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Romance, Vision and Satire

ROMANCE VISION & SATIRE

English Alliterative Poems of the Fourteenth Century

NEWLY RENDERED
IN THE ORIGINAL METRES

BY
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Preface

THE translations here printed are the first-fruits of a suggestion, made seven years ago by Professor W. H. Schofield, that I should render into modern verse a series of texts, selected by him, and covering the same ground as his history of *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*. The suggestion appealed to me for many reasons, not the least being that it would give me an opportunity of becoming familiar with works that lay outside the range of my special field of study. Fine as our English Arthurian literature undoubtedly is, it forms but a small section of the *Matière de Bretagne*, and outside the Arthurian romances I knew but little of our mediæval literature. I felt that, by undertaking the work, I should myself be the gainer, by how much I did not realize; but as time went on, and item after item of the list prepared by Professor Schofield for my guidance was marked off, I became more and more interested in the work, more and more impressed with the extraordinary richness and beauty of mediæval English poetry. In my growing enthusiasm perhaps I somewhat overstepped the limits originally designed, for when, in the winter of 1910, I placed the completed manuscript in Professor Schofield's hands, it had hopelessly outgrown the original scheme of publication. To print the whole as one volume was out of the question;

the book would have been far too cumbersome for students' use, and some scheme of division had to be thought out. Messrs. Houghton Mifflin Company having accepted the main part of the manuscript as a volume of their projected series of 'Chief Poets,' it was decided to separate the alliterative poems, otherwise provided for in their edition, and publish them thus in an independent form.

This group of fourteenth-century poems is, as a whole, extraordinarily interesting, representing as it does a period when the pleasure of telling a good story was becoming enhanced by the recognition of the power to tell that story well, when a sense of form was making itself felt, and simple alliterative verse was seeking for itself more intricate and effective shapes. Both *Sir Gawain* and *Pearl* are very elaborate in structure, the latter especially so; but even the least artistic poem here given is the product of no mean workman.

Except in the case of *Piers the Plowman*, the authors of all these poems are nameless; in them we have neither the genuine simplicity of men like Orm and Layamon, who left their names on record that their readers might remember them in their prayers, nor the conscious self-importance of Chrétien de Troyes, who, counting on enduring popularity for his poems, secured the permanent association of his name with his work by means of elaborate introductions. On the contrary, the writers of these poems seem to have been so filled with a sense of pleasure in their task, to have so delighted in the work for its own sake, that they had little thought, or care, for personal applause. Yet we may conjecture that they were not altogether obscure folk; when we read the accounts of brilliant banquets in *Sir Gawain*, *Cleanness*, and the *Morte Arthure*, we get the impression that each writer is describing a scene such as he has himself witnessed; each is familiar with all the etiquette pertaining to a royal feast, the order of precedence, the fashion of service, the variety and character of sumptuous dishes. These writers have frequented courts, and are well versed in the noble art of venery, of which Sir Tristrem was so distinguished an exponent. The authors of *Sir Gawain*, and *The Adventures of Arthur* are no novices in hunter's lore. The section dealing with the hunting of the Green Knight might in itself form a complete manual of instruction in that art! The poet of *Sir Gawain*, to whom is usually ascribed (though on no final evidence) the other poems in the Cotton MS., *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*, was without question an accomplished gentleman in the best sense of the term.

When we turn from this group to the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, we find ourselves in another, more democratic, and more modern atmosphere. In spite of the mediæval dress in which the figures of the allegory are clad, and the different surroundings amid which they move, we feel irresistibly that we are here dealing with the same problems as are crying loudly for solution to-day. The classes and the masses have drawn little nearer together; there is still the same cry on the part of the worker for a better reward for his labour, and too often, the same demand on the part of the wastrel to be fed and clothed at another's expense. The Maiden Meed no longer queens it so openly, but who shall say she has not faithful friends and servants still — that there are not at present, in high positions, men who owe their advancement as much to Meed as to Merit? The rule of Righteousness and Reason can hardly yet be said to prevail. Were Langland living today it is to be feared that he would still find food for keen and pointed satire.

With regard to the method of translation adopted, the aim has been less to furnish a 'crib,' than to give such a rendering of the works as shall enable them to make their appeal to the modern reader, not as curious specimens of writing in a dead past, but as, what they should indeed be, part of a living literature. Since the original text of these poems is now unintelligible save to scholars, they should be reproduced in their entirety, and in a verse form which preserves as much as possible the life and spirit that they once possessed. I have tried throughout to give a literal translation, but where a slavish adherence to the letter of the text would have meant hampering the rhythm, and marring the effect, I have held myself free to express the poet's idea in somewhat different words. I am well aware that some of these texts demanded for their adequate rendering a talent beyond my scope: the translation of *Pearl* needs a poet, rather than a versifier; while working on this text I was haunted by the regret that it had not been known to the late Christina Rossetti, for, surely, of all modern English writers, she could best have reproduced the glowing imagery and mystic fervour of the original.

However, for good or ill, the work is now done, and I can only commend it to the verdict of students of English literature, trusting that they who are best able to judge of the difficulties of the task will be most lenient toward any shortcomings in its fulfilment.

In conclusion, I would express my thanks to Professor Schofield for having induced me to undertake the work, and for the advice and guidance he has freely given during its execution. He is not responsible in any way for the form or the accuracy of the translations, though I have, in certain instances, revised the rendering in accordance with his suggestions.

PARIS, April 1912.

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Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

BOOK I

I

SINCE Troy's assault and siege, I trow, were over-past,
To brands and ashes burnt that stately burg at last,
And he, the traitor proved, for treason that he wrought,
Was fitly tried and judged, — his fortune elsewhere sought
The truest knight on earth, Æneas, with his kin,
Who vanquished provinces, and did, as princes, win
Of all the Western Isles, the wealth and worth alway;
Rich Romulus to Rome full swift hath ta'en his way,
First, hath he founded fair that city in his pride
To which he gave his name, it bears it to this tide;
Ticius doth dwellings found, turning to Tuscany,
And Langobard, a race raised up in Lombardy.
But Felix Brutus sailed full far, o'er the French flood,
And on its banks so broad founded Britain, the good,
in bliss;
Where war nor wonder fail
And ne'er have done, ywis,
Nor shall both bliss and bale
Their shifting chances miss.

II

And when that baron bold had Britain made, I trow,
Bold men were bred therein, who loved strife well enow,
And many a war they waged in those good days of yore —
Of marvels stern and strange, in this land many more
Have chanced than otherwhere, since that same time, I
ween —
But of all kings who e'er o'er Britain lords have been,
Fairest was Arthur all, and boldest, so men tell;
Therefore I think to shew a venture that befell
In his time, which some men for a sheer wonder hold,
And strange above all tales that be of Arthur told.
If ye will list this lay a little while, in sooth,
I'll tell ye as I heard it told in town for truth
with tongue —
As it doth stand, to wit,
In story stiff and strong,
In letters fairly writ,
The land hath known it long.

III

At Camelot lay the King, all on a Christmas-tide,
With many a lovely lord, and gallant knight beside,
And of the Table Round did the rich brotherhood
High revel hold aright, and mirthful was their mood:
Oft-times on tourney bent those gallants sought the field,
And gentle knights in joust would shiver spear and shield;

Anon would seek the court for sport and carol gay —
For fifteen days full told the feast was held alway,
With all the meat and mirth that men might well devise,
Right glorious was the glee that rang in riotous wise.
Glad clamour through the day, dancing throughout the night;
Good luck throughout the hall and chambers well bedight,
Had lords and ladies fair, each one as pleased him best,
With all of this world's weal they dwelt, those gallant guests;
For Christ no braver knights had faced or toil or strife,
No fairer ladies e'er had drawn the breath of life,
And he, the comeliest king that e'er held court, forsooth,
For all this goodly folk were e'en in their first youth,
and, still
The happiest under heaven,
A king of stalwart will,
'T were hard with them to even
Another host on hill!

IV

So young the New Year was, methinks it just was born,
Double upon the daïs they served the meat that morn;
Into the hall he came, with all his knights, the King,
E'en as the chapel choir to end the mass did sing.
Loud rang the voice of clerk and cantor there aloft,
'*Nowell, Nowell!*' they sang, and cried the word full oft.
And sithen forth they run for handsel fair and free
Their New Year's gifts they pray, or give them readily.

And then about the gifts they make debate enow,
And ladies laugh full loud, tho' they have lost, I trow!
And this I rede ye well, not wroth was he who won! —
And all this mirth they made till meal-time came — anon
The board was set, they washed, and then in order meet
The noblest aye above, each gallant took his seat.
When Gaynore, gayly clad, stepped forth among them all,
Upon the royal daïs, high in the midmost hall.
Sendal swept at her side, and eke above her head
A tapestry of Tars, and choice Toulouse outspread,
And all embroidered fair, and set with gems so gay
That might be proved of price, an ye their worth would pay one day;
Right fair she was, the queen,
With eyes of shining grey,
That fairer he had seen
No man might soothly say!

V

Arthur, he would not eat till all were served with food,
Glad of his gladness he, somewhat of child-like mood;
A changeful life he loved, he liked it not a whit,
Either o'er-long to lie, or e'en o'er-long to sit,
So chafed his youthful blood, and eke his busy brain.
Also a custom good, to which the King was fain —
Thro' valour 'stablished fast — that never would he eat
On such high holiday ere yet adventure meet

Were told unto his ear — or wondrous tale enow,
Or else some marvel great that he might well allow —
Tales of his father's days, of arms, of emprise high, —
Or e'en some knight besought another's skill to try,
To join with him in joust, in jeopardy to lay
Life against life, each one, on hap of knightly play.
As Fortune them might aid — in quest of honour fair —
This was his custom good when as in court he were
At each high holiday, among his courtiers there
in hall,
Fair-faced, and free of fear,
He sitteth o'er them all,
Right keen in that New-Year,
And maketh mirth withal.

VI

Thus in his place he stands, the young and gallant king,
Before the royal board, talking of many a thing.
There good Gawain, gay clad, beside Gaynore doth sit,
Agravain '*dure main*,' beyond her as is fit;
(Both the King's sister's sons, and knights of valiant mood —)
High at the table sits Baldwin the Bishop good,
And Ywain, Urian's son, doth with the Bishop eat —
These on the daïs are served, in seemly wise, and meet.
Full many a gallant knight sits at the board below;
See where the first course comes, while loud the trumpets blow!

With many a banner bright that gaily waves thereby,
And royal roll of drums, and pipes that shrill on high.
Wild warblings waken there, and sweet notes rise and fall,
Till many a heart swelled high within that castle hall!
Dainties they bring therewith, and meats both choice and
        rare —
Such plenty of fresh food, so many dishes bear,
They scarce might find a place to set, the folk before,
The silver vessels all that savoury messes bore,
                                        on cloth,
                The guests they help themselves,
                Thereto they be not loth,
                Each twain had dishes twelve,
                Good beer, and red wine both.

VII

Now of their service good I think no more to say,
For each man well may wot no lack was there that day.
Noise that to them was new methinks now drew anear
Such as each man in hall were ever fain to hear,
For scarce the joyful sounds unto an end were brought,
And scarce had the first course been fitly served at court,
When through the hall door rushed a champion, fierce and fell,
Highest in stature he, of all on earth who dwell!
From neck to waist so square, and eke so thickly set,
His loins and limbs alike, so long they were, and great,
Half giant upon earth, I hold him to have been,

In every way of men the tallest he, I ween —
The merriest in his might that e'er a joust might ride,
Sternly his body framed in back, and breast, and side,
Belly and waist alike were fitly formed, and small,
E'en so his features fair were sharply cut withal,
and clean,
Men marvelled at his hue,
So was his semblance seen,
He fared as one on feud,
And over all was green!

VIII

All green bedight that knight, and green his garments fair
A narrow coat that clung straight to his side he ware,
A mantle plain above, lined on the inner side
With costly fur and fair, set on good cloth and wide,
So sleek, and bright in hue — therewith his hood was gay
Which from his head was doffed, and on his shoulders lay.
Full tightly drawn his hose, all of the self-same green,
Well clasped about his calf — there-under spurs full keen
Of gold on silken lace, all striped in fashion bright,
That dangled beneath his legs — so rode that gallant knight.
His vesture, verily, was green as grass doth grow,
The barring of his belt, the blithe stones set arow,
That decked in richest wise his raiment fine and fair,
Himself, his saddle-bow, in silken broideries rare,
'T were hard to tell the half, so cunning was the wise

In which 't was broidered all with birds, and eke with flies!
Decked was the horse's neck, and decked the crupper bold,
With gauds so gay of green, the centre set with gold.
And every harness boss was all enamelled green,
The stirrups where he stood were of the self-same sheen,
The saddle-bow behind, the girths so long and fair,
They gleamed and glittered all with green stones rich and rare,
The very steed beneath the self-same semblance ware,
he rides
A green horse great and tall;
A steed full stiff to guide,
In broidered bridle all
He worthily bestrides!

IX

Right gaily was the knight bedecked, all green his weed,
The hair upon his head, the mane of his good steed,
Fair floating locks enfold his shoulders broad and strong,
Great as a bush the beard that on his breast low hung,
And, with his goodly hair that hung down from his head,
A covering round his arms, above his elbows, spread.
Laced were his arms below, e'en in the self-same way
As a king's cap-a-dos, that clasps his neck alway.
The mane of that great steed was well and deftly wrought,
Well crisped and combed the hair, with many a knot incaught.
Folded with golden thread about the green so fair,

Here lay a twist of gold, and here a coil of hair.
In self-same wise the tail and top-most crest were twined,
A band of brightest green the twain alike did bind,
Which, set with precious stones, hung the tail's length adown,
Then, twisted in a knot, on high the crest did crown.
There-from hung many a bell, of burnished gold so bright;
Such foal upon the fell, bestridden by such knight,
Sure ne'er within that hall before of mortal sight
were seen,
As lightning gleaming bright
So seemed to all his sheen,
They deemed that no man might
Endure his blows so keen.

X

Nor helmet on his head, nor hauberk did he wear,
Gorget nor breast-plate good, as knights are wont to bear;
Nor shaft to smite, nor shield that blows might well withstand,
Naught but a holly bough he carried in one hand,
(When all the groves be bare then fullest is its green),
And in his other hand a huge axe, sharp and sheen,
A weapon ill to see, would one its fashion say,
The haft, it measured full an ell-yard long alway,
The blade of good green steel, and all with gold inlaid,
Right sharp and broad the edge, and burnished bright the blade.

'T was sharpened well to cut, e'en as a razor good,
Right well the steel was set in staff so stiff of wood,
And iron bands to bind throughout the length it bare,
With cunning work of green all wrought, and graven fair.
Twined with a lace that fell in silken loops so soft
E'en at the head, adown the haft 't was caught full oft
With hanging tassells fair that silken threads entwine,
And buttons of bright green, all broidered fair and fine.
Thus in the great hall door the knight stood, fair and tall,
Fearless and free his gaze, he gat him down the hall,
Greeting he gave to none, but looked right steadily
Toward the royal seat, and quoth, 'Now where is he,
The lord of all this folk? To see him am I fain,
And with himself would speak, might I the boon attain!' —
With frown
He looked upon the knights,
And paced him up and down,
Fain would he know aright
Who was of most renown!

XI

Then each man gazed amain, each would that hero see,
And each man marvelled much what might the meaning be,
That man and horse, alike, of such a hue were seen,
Green as the growing grass; and greener still, I ween,
E'en than enamel green on gold that gloweth bright:
Then all with one consent drew near unto that knight,

A-marvelling fell they all who he might be, ywis,
For strange sights had they seen, but none so strange as this!
The folk, they deemed it well fantasm, or faërie,
And none among them all dare answer speedily,
But all, astonied, gazed, and held them still as stone,
Throughout that goodly hall, in silence every one,
Their faces changed, as they by sleep were overcome,
suddenly,
I deem not all for fear,
But some for courtesy,
They fain would lend an ear
And let the King reply.

XII

Arthur before his daïs beheld this marvel fair,
And boldly did he speak for dread, he knew it ne'er —
And said: 'Right welcome, Sir, to this my house and hall,
Head of this hostel I, and *Arthur*, men me call.
Alight from this thy steed, and linger here, I pray,
And what thy will may be hereafter shalt thou say.'
'So help me,' quoth the knight, 'the God who rules o'er all,
I came not here to bide within thy castle wall,
The praise of this thy folk throughout the world is told,
Thy burg, thy barons all, bravest and best they hold,
The stiffest under steel who battle-steed bestride,
Wisest and worthiest they, throughout the whole world wide,
Proven right well in joust, and all fair knightly play,

Renowned for courtesy — so have I heard men say —
And this hath brought me here, e'en at this Yule-tide fair,
For be ye well assured by this green branch I bear
That I would pass in peace, and seek no battle here —
For an it were my will to ride in warlike gear
I have at home an helm, and hauberk good and strong,
A shield and shining spear, with blade both sharp and long,
And other weapons good, that well a knight beseem,
But since I seek no war my weeds are soft, I ween,
And if ye be so bold as all men say ye be
The favour that I ask ye sure will grant to me
of right,'
Arthur, he was not slow
To speak, 'I trow, Sir Knight,
An here thou seek'st a foe
Thou shalt not fail for fight!'

XIII

'Nay, here I crave no fight, in sooth I say to thee,
The knights about thy board but beardless bairns they be,
An I were fitly armed, upon this steed so tall,
For lack of strength no man might match me in this hall!
Therefore within thy court I crave a Christmas jest,
'T is Yuletide, and New Year, and here be many a guest,
If any in this hall himself so hardy hold,
So valiant of his hand, of blood and brain so bold,
That stroke for counter-stroke with me exchange he dare,

I give him of free gift this gisarme rich and fair,
This axe of goodly weight, to wield as he see fit,
And I will bide his blow, as bare as here I sit.
If one will test my words, and be of valiant mood,
Then let him swiftly come, and take this weapon good, —
Here I renounce my claim, the axe shall be his own —
And I will stand his stroke, here, on this floor of stone,
That I in turn a blow may deal, that boon alone
I pray,
Yet respite shall he have
A twelvemonth, and a day.
Now quickly I thee crave —
Who now hath aught, to say?'

XIV

If erst they were amazed, now stiller sat they all,
Both high and low, those knights within King Arthur's hall,
The knight upon his steed he sat him fast and true,
And round about the hall his fierce red eyes he threw,
From 'neath his bushy brows, (all green they were in hue,)
Twisting his beard he waits to see if none will rise,
When no man proffers speech with mocking voice he cries,
'What, is this Arthur's house? Is this his gallant band
Whose fame hath run abroad through many a realm and land?
Where be your vaunted pride? Your conquests, where be they?
Your wrath, and fierceness fell, your boastful words alway?

Now is the Table Round, its revel and renown,
O'er-thrown with but a word from one man's mouth alone,
Since none dare speak for dread tho' ne'er a dint he see! —'
With that he laughed so loud Arthur must shaméd be,
And in his face so fair the blood rose ruddily
alight,
As wind waxed wroth the King
And every gallant knight,
In words of warlike ring
He hailed that man of might.

XV

And quoth, 'By Heaven, Sir Knight, thou speakest foolishly,
But what thy folly craves we needs must grant to thee,
I trow no knight of mine thy boastful words doth fear,
That goodly axe of thine in God's name give me here,
And *I* will give the boon which thou dost here demand!'
With that he lightly leapt, and caught him by the hand,
Then lighted down the knight, before the King he stood,
And Arthur, by the haft he gripped that axe so good,
And swung it sternly round, as one who thought to smite,
Before him on the floor he stood, that stranger knight,
Taller by full a head than any in the hall,
With stern mien did he stand, and stroked his beard withal,
And drew his coat adown, e'en with unruffled cheer,
No more was he dismayed for threats he needs must hear
Than at the royal board one bare a cup anear

of wine,
Gawain from out his place
Spake fitting words and fine,
'I pray thee of thy grace
Be this adventure mine!'

XVI

Quoth Gawain to the King, 'I pray right worthily
Thou bid me quit this seat, and take my stand by thee,
That so without reproach, I from this board may rise,
And that it be not ill in my liege lady's eyes,
I'll to thy counsel come before this royal court,
Unfitting do I deem that such a boon be sought,
And such a challenge raised in this your goodly hall
That thou thyself be fain to answer it withal,
While many a valiant knight doth sit beside thee still —
I wot there be 'neath Heaven no men of sterner will,
Nor braver on the field where men fight as is fit —
Methinks, the weakest I, the feeblest here of wit,
The less loss of my life, if thou the sooth would'st say!
Save as thy near of kin no praise were mine alway,
No virtue save thy blood I in my body know!
Since this be folly all, nor thine to strike this blow,
And I have prayed the boon, then grant it unto me,
This good court, an I bear myself ungallantly,
may blame!'
Together did they press,

Their counsel was the same,
To free the King, no less,
And give Gawain the game.

XVII

Then did the King command that gallant knight to rise,
And swiftly up he gat in fair and courteous wise,
And knelt before his lord, and gripped the axe's haft,
The King, he loosed his hold, and raised his hand aloft,
And blessed him in Christ's Name, and bade him in good part
To be of courage still, hardy of hand and heart.
'Now, Nephew, keep thee well,' he quoth, 'deal but one blow,
And if thou red'st him well, in very truth I know
The blow that he shall deal thou shalt right well withstand!'
Gawain strode to the knight, the gisarme in his hand,
Right boldly did he bide, no whit abashed, I ween,
And frankly to Gawain he quoth, that knight in green,
'Make we a covenant here, ere yet we further go,
And first I ask, Sir Knight, that I thy name may know,
I bid thee tell me true, that I assured may be —'
'I' faith,' quoth that good knight, '*Gawain*, I wot, is he
Who giveth thee this blow, be it for good or ill,
A twelvemonth hence I'll take another at thy will,
The weapon be thy choice, I'll crave no other still alive!'
The other quoth again,
'Gawain, so may I thrive,

But I shall take full fain,
The dint that thou shalt drive!'

XVIII

'By Christ,' quoth the Green Knight, 'I trow I am full fain
The blow that here I craved to take from thee, Gawain,
And thou hast well rehearsed, in fashion fair, I trow,
The covenant and the boon I prayed the king but now;
Save that thou here, Sir Knight, shalt soothly swear to me
To seek me out thyself, where e'er it seemeth thee
I may be found on field, and there in turn demand
Such dole as thou shalt deal before this goodly band!'
'Now,' quoth the good Gawain, 'by Him who fashioned me,
I wot not where to seek, nor where thy home shall be,
I know thee not, Sir Knight, thy court, nor yet thy name,
Teach me thereof the truth, and tell me of that same,
And I will use my wit to win me to that goal,
And here I give thee troth, and swear it on my soul!'
'Nay, in this New Year's tide it needs no more, I ween,' —
So to the good Gawain he quoth, that knight in green,
'Save that I tell thee true — when I the blow have ta'en,
Which thou shalt smartly smite — and teach thee here amain
Where be my house, my home, and what my name shall be;
Then may'st thou find thy road, and keep thy pledge with me.
But if I waste no speech, thou shalt the better speed,
And in thy land may'st dwell, nor further seek at need
for fight

Take thy grim tool to thee,
Let see how thou can'st smite!'
Quoth Gawain, 'Willingly,'
And stroked his axe so bright.

XIX

The Green Knight on the ground made ready speedily,
He bent his head adown, that so his neck were free,
His long and lovely locks, across the crown they fell,
His bare neck to the nape all men might see right well
Gawain, he gripped his axe, and swung it up on high,
The left foot on the ground he setteth steadily
Upon the neck so bare he let the blade alight,
The sharp edge of the axe the bones asunder smite —
Sheer thro' the flesh it smote, the neck was cleft in two,
The brown steel on the ground it bit, so strong the blow,
The fair head from the neck fell even to the ground,
Spurned by the horse's hoof, e'en as it rolled around,
The red blood spurted forth, and stained the green so bright,
But ne'er for that he failed, nor fell, that stranger knight,
Swiftly he started up, on stiff and steady limb,
And stretching forth his hand, as all men gaped at him,
Grasped at his goodly head, and lift it up again,
Then turned him to his steed, and caught the bridle rein,
Set foot in stirrup-iron, bestrode the saddle fair,
The while he gripped his head e'en by the flowing hair.
He set himself as firm in saddle, so I ween,

As naught had ailed him there, tho' headless he was seen
in hall;
He turned his steed about,
That corpse, that bled withal,
Full many there had doubt
Of how the pledge might fall!

XX

The head, within his hand he held it up a space,
Toward the royal daïs, forsooth, he turned the face,
The eyelids straight were raised, and looked with glance so
clear,
Aloud it spake, the mouth, e'en as ye now may hear;
'Look, Gawain, thou be swift to speed as thou hast said,
And seek, in all good faith, until thy search be sped,
E'en as thou here didst swear, in hearing of these knights —
To the Green Chapel come, I charge thee now aright,
The blow thou hast deserved, such as was dealt to-day,
E'en on the New Year's morn I pledge me to repay,
Full many know my name, "*Knight of the Chapel Green*,"
To find me, should'st thou seek, thou wilt not fail, I ween,
Therefore thou need'st must come, or be for recreant found!'
With fierce pull at the rein he turned his steed around,
His head within his hand, forth from the hall he rode,
Beneath his horse's hoofs the sparks they flew abroad,
No man in all the hall wist where he took his way,
Nor whence that knight had come durst any of them say,

what then?
The King and Gawain there
They gazed, and laughed again,
Proven it was full fair
A marvel unto men!

XXI

Tho' Arthur in his heart might marvel much, I ween,
No semblance in his speech of fear or dread was seen
Unto the Queen he quoth, in courteous wise, and gay,
'Dear lady, at this tide let naught your heart dismay,
Such craft doth well, methinks, to Christmas-time belong,
When jests be soothly sought, with laugh and merry song,
And when in carols gay our knights and ladies vie —
Natheless unto my meat I'll get me presently,
I may not soon forget the sight mine eyes have seen!'
He turned him to Gawain, and quoth with gladsome mien,
'Now, Sir, hang up thine axe, the blow was soundly sped!'
'T was hung above the daïs, on dossel overhead,
That all within the hall might look upon it well,
And by that token true the tale of wonder tell,
Then to the royal board they sat them down, those twain,
The King, and the good knight, and men for service fain
As to the noblest there with double portion wend —
With meat and minstrelsy the Yule-tide feast they spend,
With joy they pass the day till shades of night descend
o'er land,

Now think thee well, Gawain,
And fail not to withstand
The venture thou wast fain
To take unto thine hand!

BOOK II

I

Now this first venture fair, befell in the New Year
To Arthur, who such feats was ever fain to hear;
Altho' his words were few whenas at meat they met;
But now to task full stern their hand methinks be set.
Right gladly did Gawain begin these games in hall,
If heavy be the end, small wonder were withal:
A man hath merry mind when he hath drunk amain,
Speedy, the year hath sped and cometh not again;
Beginnings to their end do all unlike appear —
The Yuletide passed away; and eke the after year
Each season severally after the other sent;
When Christmas-tide was past then came the crabbéd Lent,
That, changing flesh for fish, doth simpler food provide;
The weather of the world with winter then doth chide,
The cold no longer clings, the clouds themselves uplift,
Shed swift the rain, and warm, the showers of springtide drift,
Fall fair upon the field, the flowers all unfold,
The grass, and e'en the groves all green ye may behold.

The birds begin to build, and greet, with joyful song,
Solace of summer sweet, that followeth ere long —
On bank
The blossoms fair they blow
In hedgerow rich and rank;
The birds sing loud and low
In woodland deep and dank.

II

After the summer-tide, with gentle winds and soft,
When zephyr on the sward and seeds doth breathe full oft,
(Full gladsome is the growth waxing therefrom, I ween,
Whenas the dewdrops drip from off the leaves so green,
Beneath the blissful beams of the bright summer sun) —
Then nigheth harvest-tide, hardening the grain anon,
With warnings to wax ripe ere come the winter cold,
With drought he drives the dust before him on the wold,
From off the field it flies, in clouds it riseth high;
Winds of the welkin strive with the sun, wrathfully,
The leaves fall from the bough, and lie upon the ground,
And grey is now the grass that erst all green was found;
Ripens and rots the fruit that once was flower gay —
And thus the year doth turn to many a yesterday,
Winter be come again, as needeth not to say
the sage;
Then, when Saint Michael's moon
Be come with winter's gage

Gawain bethinks him soon
Of his dread venture's wage.

III

Yet till All-Hallows' Day with Arthur did he bide,
Then for his sake the king a fair feast did provide,
Rich was the revel there of the good Table Round,
There were both courteous knights and comely ladies found,
And many sorrowed sore all for that good knight's sake —
Yet none the less no sign of aught but mirth they make,
Tho' joyless all the jests they bandy at that same —
With mourning after meat he to his uncle came,
And of his journey spake, and openly did say:
'Now, liege Lord of my life, your leave I fain would pray,
Ye know how stands the case, thereof no more I'll speak —
Since talk, it mendeth naught, 't were trifling ease to seek;
I to the blow am bound, to-morrow must I fare
To seek the Knight in Green, God knoweth how, or where.'
The best knights in the burg together then they ran,
Yvain and Erec there, with many another man,
Dodinel le Sauvage; the Duke of Clarence came,
Lancelot, Lionel, and Lucain, at that same,
Sir Boors, Sir Bedivere, (the twain were men of might,)
With Mador de la Port, and many another knight.
Courtiers in company nigh to the king they drew,
For counselling that knight, much care at heart they knew.
In dole so drear their tears in hall together blend

To think that good Gawain must on such errand wend
Such dolefull dint endure, no more fair blows to spend
and free —
The knight he made good cheer,
He quoth: 'What boots it me?
For tho' his weird be drear
Each man that same must dree.'

IV

He dwelt there all that day, at early dawn besought
That men would bring his arms, and all were straightway brought.
A carpet on the floor they stretch full fair and tight,
Rich was the golden gear that on it glittered bright.
The brave man stepped thereon, the steel he handled fair,
A doublet dear of Tars they did upon him there,
A cunning cap-a-dos, that fitted close and well,
All fairly lined throughout, as I have heard it tell.
They set the shoes of steel upon the hero's feet,
And wrapped the legs in greaves, of steel, as fit and meet.
The caps that 'longed thereto polished they were full clean,
And knit about the knee with knots of golden sheen.
Comely the cuisses were that closed him all about
With thongs all tightly tied around his thighs so stout.
And then a byrnie bright with burnished steel they bring,
Upon a stuff so fair woven with many a ring.
And now upon each arm they set the burnished brace

With elbow plates so good — the metal gloves they lace;
Thus all the goodly gear to shield him was in place
that tide —
Rich surcoat doth he wear,
And golden spurs of pride,
His sword is girt full fair
With silk, upon his side.

V

When he was fitly armed his harness rich they deem,
Nor loop nor latchet small but was with gold a-gleam;
Then, harnessed as he was, his Mass he heard straightway,
On the high altar there an offering meet did lay.
Then, coming to the king, and to the knights at court,
From lords and ladies fair lightly his leave besought.
They kissed the knight, his soul commending to Christ's care —
Ready was Gringalet, girt with a saddle fair,
Gaily it gleamed that day, with fringes all of gold,
For this adventure high new nails it bare for old.
The bridle barred about, with gold adornéd well,
The harness of the neck, the skirts that proudly fell,
Crupper and coverture match with the saddle-bow,
On all the red gold nails were richly set a-row,
They glittered and they gleamed, e'en as the sun, I wis —
The knight, he takes his helm, and greets it with a kiss.
'T was hooped about with steel, and all full fitly lined,

He set it on his head, and hasped it close behind.
Over the visor, lo! a kerchief lieth light,
Broidered about and bound with goodly gems and bright,
On a broad silken braid — there many a bird is seen
The painted perroquet appeareth there between
Turtles and true-love knots, so thick entwinéd there,
As maids seven winters long had wrought with labour fair
in town;
Full dear the circlet's price
That lay around the crown,
Of diamonds its device
That were both bright and brown.

VI

The shield they shewed him then, of flaming gules so red,
There the Pentangle shines, in pure gold burnishéd.
On baldric bound, the shield, he to his neck makes tight,
Full well I ween, that sign became the comely knight;
And why unto that prince the badge doth well pertain,
Tarry thereby my tale, I yet to tell am fain.
(For Solomon as sign erst the Pentangle set
In tokening of truth, it bears that title yet.)
For 't is in figure formed of full five points I ween,
Each line in other laced, no ending there is seen.
Each doth the other lock — in English land, I wot,
It beareth everywhere the name of '*Endless Knot.*'
Therefore as fitting badge the knight this sign doth wear,

For faithful he in five, five-fold the gifts he bare,
Sir Gawain, good was he, pure as refinéd gold,
Void of all villainy, virtue did him enfold,
and grace —
So the Pentangle new
Hath on his shield a place,
As knight of heart most true,
Fairest of form and face.

VII

First was he faultless found in his five wits, I ween;
Nor failed his fingers five where'er he yet had been;
And all his earthly trust upon those five wounds lay
That Christ won on the Cross, e'en as the Creed doth say.
And wheresoever Fate to fiercest fight did bring,
Truly in thought he deemed, above all other thing,
That all his force, forsooth, from those five joys he drew
Which through her Holy Child, the Queen of Heaven knew;
And for this cause the knight, courteous and comely, bare
On one half of his shield her image painted fair,
That when he looked thereon his courage might not fail —
The fifth five that I find did much this knight avail
Were Frankness, Fellowship, all other gifts above,
Cleanness and Courtesy, that ever did him move,
And Pity, passing all — I trow in this fair five
That knight was clothed and happed o'er all that be alive.
And all these gifts, fivefold, upon that knight were bound,

Each in the other linked, that none an end had found.
Fast fixed upon five points, I trow, that failed him ne'er,
Nor joined at any side, nor sundered anywhere.
Nor was there any point, so cunningly they blend,
Where they beginning make, or where they find an end.
Therefore, upon his shield, fair-shapen, doth that same
Sign, in fair red gold gleam, upon red gules aflame,
Which the Pentangle pure the folk do truly name
with lore —
Armed is Sir Gawain gay,
His lance aloft he bore,
And wished them all 'Good-day,'
He deemed, for evermore.

VIII

Spurs to his steed he set, and sprang upon his way,
So that from out the stones the sparks they flew alway —
Seeing that seemly sight the hearts of all did sink,
Each soothly said to each that which they secret think,
Grieved for that comely knight — 'By Christ, 't were pity great
If yon good knight be lost, who is of fair estate;
His peer on field to find, i' faith, it were not light,
'T were better to have wrought by wile, methinks, than might!
Such doughty knight a duke were worthier to have been,
A leader upon land, gladly we such had seen! —

Such lot were better far than he were brought to naught,
Hewn by an elfish man, for gage of prideful thought!
Did ever any king obey such strange behest,
As risk a goodly knight upon a Christmas jest?'
Much water warm, I ween, welled from the eyes of all,
Whenas that gallant knight gat him from Arthur's hall
that day:
Nor here would he abide,
But swiftly went his way,
By toilsome paths did ride,
E'en as the book doth say.

IX

Now rides Gawain the good thro' Logres' realm, I trow,
Forth doth he fare on quest that seemeth ill enow;
Often, companionless, at night alone must lie,
The fare he liketh best he lacketh verily;
No fellow save his foal hath he by wood or wold,
With none, save God alone, that knight may converse hold;
Till that unto North Wales full nigh he needs must draw,
The isles of Anglesey on his left hand he saw;
And fared across the ford and foreland at that same,
Over 'gainst Holyhead, so that he further came
To Wirral's wilds, methinks, nor long therein abode
Since few within that land, they love or man, or God!
And ever as he fared he asked the folk, I ween,
If they had heard men tell tale of a Knight in Green

In all that land about? Or of a Chapel Green?
And all men answered, 'Nay,' naught of that knight they knew,
And none had seen with sight a man who bare such hue as green;
The knight took roads full strange,
And rugged paths between,
His mood full oft did change
Ere he his goal had seen.

X

Full many a cliff he climbs within that country's range,
Far flying from his friends he rideth lone and strange;
At every ford and flood he passed upon his way
He found a foe before, of fashion grim alway.
So foul they were, and fell, that he of needs must fight —
So many a marvel there befell that gallant knight
That tedious 't were to tell the tithe thereof, I ween —
Sometimes with worms he warred, or wolves his foes have been;
Anon with woodmen wild, who in the rocks do hide —
Of bulls, or bears, or boars, the onslaught doth he bide;
And giants, who drew anigh, from off the moorland height;
Doughty in durance he, and shielded by God's might
Else, doubtless, had he died, full oft had he been slain.
Yet war, it vexed him less than winter's bitter bane,
When the clear water cold from out the clouds was shed,

And froze ere yet it fell on fallow field and dead;
Then, more nights than enow, on naked rocks he lay,
And, half slain with the sleet, in harness slept alway.
While the cold spring that erst its waters clattering flung
From the cliff high o'erhead, in icicles now hung.
In peril thus, and pain, and many a piteous plight
Until the Yuletide Eve alone that gallant knight
did fare;
Sir Gawain, at that tide,
To Mary made his prayer,
For fain he was to ride
Where he might shelter share.

XI

That morn beside a mount his road the knight doth keep,
Threading a forest wild, with ways both strange and deep;
High hills on either hand, and holts full thick below,
Where hoar oaks, hundredfold, do close together grow;
Hazel and hawthorn there, in tangled thicket clung,
Ragged and rough, the moss o'er all a covering flung.
And many birds unblithe, on boughs ye might behold,
Piping full piteously, for pain of bitter cold.
Gawain, on Gringalet, fares lonely thro' the glade,
Thro' many a miry marsh, at heart full sore afraid
That he no shelter find, that, as was fit and right
He serve betimes that Sire, who, on that selfsame night
Was of a Maiden born, our bale to cure, I trow —

Therefore he, sighing, said: 'Lord Christ, I pray Thee now,
And Mary Mother mild, for her Son's sake so dear,
A haven I may find, Thy mass may fitly hear,
And matins at the morn — meekly I crave this boon,
And Paternoster pray, and Ave too, right soon,
with Creed —'
Thus praying, did he ride,
Confessing his misdeed,
Crossing himself, he cried:
'Christ's Cross me better speed!'

XII

Scarce had he signed himself, I ween, of times but three,
When there within the wood a dwelling doth he see;
Above a laund, on lawe, shaded by many a bough,
About its moat there stand of stately trees enow.
The comeliest castle sure, for owner strong and stout,
Set in a meadow fair with park all round about,
Within a palisade of spikes set thick and close,
For more than two miles round the trees they fast enclose;
Sir Gawain, from the side of that burg was aware,
Shimmered the walls, and shone, thro' oaken branches bare.
Then swift he doffed his helm, thanking, I trow, that day
Christ, and Saint Julian, that they had heard alway
Courteous, his piteous prayer, and hearkened to his cry —
'Now grant me,' quoth the knight, 'here right good hostelry.'
Then pricked he Gringalet, with spurs of golden sheen,

The good steed chooseth well the chiefest gate, I ween.
And swift to the bridge end, he comes, the knight so keen,
at last;
The bridge aloft was stayed,
The gates were shut full fast,
The walls were well arrayed,
They feared no tempest's blast.

XIII

The knight upon the bank his charger there doth stay,
Beyond the double ditch that round the castle lay,
The walls, in water set they were, and wondrous deep,
And high above his head it towered, the castle keep;
Of hard stone, fitly hewn, up to the corbels fair,
Beneath the battlements the stones well shapen were.
Above 't was fairly set with turrets in between,
And many a loop-hole fair for watchman's gaze so keen.
A better barbican had never met his eye —
Within, the knight beheld a goodly hall and high,
The towers set between the bristling battlements,
Round were they, shapen fair, of goodly ornament,
With carven capitals, by cunning craft well wrought,
Of chalk-white chimneys too, enow they were he thought.
On battled roof, arow, they shone, and glittered white,
And many a pinnacle adorned that palace bright.
The castle cornices they crownéd everywhere
So white and thick, it seemed they pared from paper were.

Gawain on Gringalet right good the castle thought
So he might find within the shelter that he sought,
And there, until the feast to fitting end were brought
might rest,
He called, a porter came,
With fair speech, of the guest
He craved from wall his name,
And what were his behest?

XIV

'Good Sir,' then quoth Gawain, 'do thou for me this task,
Get thee unto thy lord, and say I shelter ask.'
'Nay, by Saint Peter good,' the porter quoth, ''t is well
Welcome be ye, Sir Knight, within these walls to dwell
Long as it liketh ye.' Then swift his way he went,
As swiftly came again, with folk on welcome bent.
The drawbridge let adown, from out the gate they came,
And on the ground so cold they knelt low at that same,
To welcome that good knight in worthy wise that tide;
They shew to him the gate with portals opened wide,
Then o'er the bridge he gat, with greeting gay, the knight,
Serjants his stirrups seize, and bid him swift alight.
To stable that good steed the men run readily,
The knights and squires, they come adown full speedily,
To bring that gentle knight with bliss unto the hall —
Whenas he raised his helm they hasted one and all,
To take it from his hand, to serve him are they fain,

His goodly sword and shield, in charge they take the twain.
Then greeting good he gave those nobles, every one,
The proud men, pressing nigh, to him have honour done,
Still in his harness happed, to hall they lead him there,
Upon the floor there flamed a fire both fierce and fair,
The castle's lord doth come forth from his chamber door,
To greet, with fitting grace, his guest upon the floor.
He quoth: 'Be welcome here to stay as likes ye still,
For here all is your own to have at your own will,
and hold —'
'Gramercy,' quoth Gawain,
'Of Christ be payment told,'
In courteous wise the twain
Embrace as heroes bold.

XV

Gawain gazed on the knight, who goodly greeting gave,
And deemed that burg so bright was owned of baron brave,
For huge was he in height, and manhood's age he knew,
His broad beard on his breast, as beaver was its hue.
And stalwart in his stride, and strong, and straight, was he,
His face was red as fire, and frank his speech and free.
In sooth, Sir Gawain thought, 'T would 'seem him well on land
To lead in lordship good of men a gallant band.
The lord, he led the way unto a chamber there,
And did his folk command to serve him fit and fair,
Then at his bidding came full many a gallant knight

They led him to a bower, with noble bedding dight.
The curtains all of silk, and hemmed with golden thread,
And comely coverings of fairest cloth o'er spread.
Above, of silk so bright, the broideries they were,
The curtains ran on ropes, with rings of red gold fair.
Rich tapestries of Tars, and Toulouse, on the wall
Hung fair, the floor was spread with the like cloth withal.
And there did they disarm, with many a mirthful rede,
The knight of byrnie bright, and of his warlike weed.
Then rich robes in their stead, I trow, they swiftly brought,
And for the change they chose the choicest to their thought.
Then soon he did them on, and I would have ye know,
Right well became the knight those skirts of seemly flow.
That hero, fair of face, he seeméd verily,
To all men who his mien and hue might nearer see
So sweet and lovesome there, of limb so light, they thought
That never Christ on earth a comelier had wrought —
                    That knight
        Thro' the world far and near
        Might well be deemed of right
        A prince with ne'er a peer
        In field of fiercest fight.

XVI

A chair before the fire of charcoal, burning bright,
They set for good Gawain, with cloth all draped and dight.
Cushion and footstool fit, the twain they were right good,

Then men a mantle cast around him as he stood,
'T was of a bliaunt brown, broidered in rich device,
And fairly furred within with pelts of goodly price,
Of whitest ermine all, and even so the hood.
Down in that seemly seat he sat, the gallant good,
And warmed him at the fire — then bettered was his cheer;
On trestles fairly set they fix a table near
And spread it with a cloth, that shewed all clean and white,
Napkin and salt-cellar with silver spoons so bright.
The knight washed at his will, and set him down to eat,
Serjants, they served him there in seemly wise and meet;
With diverse dishes sweet, and seasoned of the best,
A double portion then they set before the guest,
Of fishes, baked in bread, or broiled on glowing wood,
Anon came fishes seethed, or stewed with spices good,
With choicest dainties there, as pleasing to his taste —
The knight, he quoth full oft, a feast that board had graced,
Then all, as with one voice, this answer made in haste:
'Fair Friend,
This penance shall ye take,
It shall ye well amend!'
Much mirth the knight did make
For wine did gladness lend.

XVII

The hosts, in courteous wise the truth are fain to know
Of this, their goodly guest, if he his name will shew?

As courteously he quoth, he from that court did fare
Holden of good renown, where Arthur rule did bear,
(Rich, royal king was he) o'er all the Table Round —
And 't was Gawain himself who here had haven found,
Hither for Christmas come, as chance had ruled it right —
Then when the lord had learned he had for guest that knight
Loudly he laughed for joy, he deemed such tidings good —
All men within the moat they waxed of mirthful mood
To think that they that tide should in his presence be
Who, for his prowess prized, and purest courtesie,
That doth to him belong, was praiséd everywhere,
Of all men upon earth none might with him compare.
Each to his fellow said, full softly, 'Now shall we
The seemly fashion fair of courts full fitly see,
With faultless form of speech, and trick of noble word,
What charm in such may be that shall, unasked, be heard
Since here the father fine of courtesie we greet.
Methinks Christ sheweth us much grace, and favour meet,
In granting us such guest for Yule as good Gawain:
When men, blithe for His birth, to sit, methinks, are fain,
and sing,
Customs of courtesie
This knight to us shall teach
And from his lips maybe
We 'll learn of love the speech.'

XVIII

By that was dinner done, the knight from table rose,
The eventide drew nigh, the day was near its close,
The chosen chaplains there to chapel go forthright,
Loudly the bells they ring, e'en as was fit and right.
To solemn evensong of this High Feast they go —
The lord the prayers would hear, his lady fair also,
To comely closet closed she entereth straightway;
And even so, full soon, follows Sir Gawain gay.
The lord his lappet took, and led him to a seat,
Hailing him by his name, in guise of friendship meet,
Of all knights in the world was he most welcome there —
He thanked him, and the twain embrace with kisses fair,
And soberly they sit throughout the service high —
Then 't was the lady's will to see that knight with eye,
With many a maiden fair she cometh from her place,
Fairest was she in skin, in figure, and in face,
Of height and colour too, in every way so fair
That e'en Gaynore, the queen, might scarce with her compare.
She thro' the chancel came, to greet that hero good,
Led by another dame, who at her left hand stood;
Older she was, I trow, and reverend seemingly,
With goodly following of nobles, verily;
But all unlike to sight, I trow, those ladies were,
Yellow, the older dame, whereas the first was fair.
The cheeks of one were red, e'en as the rose doth glow,
The other, wrinkles rough, in plenty, did she shew.

The younger, kerchiefs soft, with many a pearl so white,
Ware, that her breast and throat full well displayed to sight,
Whiter they were than snow that on the hills doth lie —
The other's neck was veiled in gorget folded high,
That all her chin so black was swathed in milk-white folds;
Her forehead all, I ween, in silk was rapped and rolled,
Broidered it was full fair, adorned with knots enow,
Till naught of her was seen save the black bristly brow.
Her eyes, her nose, I ween, and eke her lips, were bare
And those were ill to see, so bleared and sour they were —
Meet mistress upon mold, so men might her declare
that tide —
Short and thick-set was she,
Her hips were broad and wide,
And fairer far to see
The lady at her side.

XIX

When Gawain saw that dame, gracious of mien, and gay,
Leave from his host he craved, and t'wards her took his way;
The elder, bowing low, he fittingly doth greet,
Lightly within his arms he folds the lady sweet
Gives her a comely kiss, as fit from courteous knight;
She hailed him as her friend — a boon he prays forthright,
Her servant would he be, an so her will it were —
Betwixt the twain he walks, and, talking still, they fare
To hall, and e'en to hearth, and at the lord's command

Spices in plenty great are ready to their hand,
With wine that maketh gay at feast time, as is meet —
The lord, in laughing wise, he sprang unto his feet,
Bade them make mirth enow — all men his words must hear —
His hood he doffed from head, and hung it on a spear,
And quoth that that same man worship thereof should win
Who made the greatest mirth that Christmas-tide within:
'I'll fail not, by my faith, to frolic with the best,
Ere that my hood I lose — with help of every guest.'
And thus, with joyous jest the lord doth try withal
To gladden Sir Gawain with games in this his hall
that night;
Till that the torches' flare
He needs must bid them light,
Gawain must from them fare
And seek his couch forthright.

XX

Then, on the morrow morn, when all men bear in mind
How our dear Lord was born to die for all mankind,
Joy in each dwelling dwells, I wot well, for His sake,
So did it there that day, when men High Feast would make;
For then, at every meal, messes, full richly dressed,
Men served upon the daïs, with dainties of the best;
That ancient lady there doth fill the highest seat,
The castle's lord, I trow, beside her, as was meet.
Sir Gawain hath his place beside that lady gay

At midmost of the board, when meat was served alway.
And then, thro' all the hall, each one, as 'seemed him best,
Sat, each in his degree — fitly they served each guest,
Much meat had they and mirth, with joy and merry song,
Methinks to tell thereof would take me over-long
Altho' perchance I strove to tell that tale as meet —
I wot well that Gawain, and this, the lady sweet,
In their fair fellowship much comfort needs must find,
In the dear dalliance of words and glances kind,
And converse courteous, from all unfitness free —
Such pastime fitting were for prince in purity —
Sweet strain
Of trump and piping clear
And drum, doth sound amain;
Each doth his minstrel hear,
And even so the twain.

XXI

Much mirth they made that day, and e'en the morrow's morn
Nor slackened of the feast when the third day was born;
The joy of sweet Saint John, gentle it was to hear,
The folk, they deemed the feast fast to its end drew near;
(The guests must needs depart, e'en in the dawning grey)
Full early did they rise, and serve the wine straightway;
Danced carols merrily, so, blithe, the day they passed,
And when the hour waxed late they took their leave at last.
Each one to wend his way whenas the day should break —

Gawain would bid good-day — his hand the lord doth take
To his own chamber leads, and by the chimney wide,
To thank his guest full fain, he draweth him aside;
Thanks him for worship fair that he from him had won,
And for the honour high he to his house had done
By lending countenance unto this Christmas Feast —
'Of honours, while I live, I 'll count this not the least
That Gawain this, my guest, at Christ's own Feast hath been!' —
'Gramercy,' quoth Gawain, 'In all good faith, I ween
The honour it is yours, and may Christ you repay,
I wait upon your word, to do your will alway
As I be bound thereto by night and e'en-by day
of right —'
The lord, he was full fain
To keep with him the knight,
Then answered him Gawain
That he in no wise might.

XXII

The lord, he courteous prayed that he would tell him there
What deed of daring drove Gawain afar to fare
E'en at this time from court, and thus alone to wend,
Before this Holy Feast had come unto an end?
'In sooth, Sir,' quoth the knight, 'Ye speak the truth alway,
A hasty quest, and high, doth send me on my way,
For I myself must seek, and find, a certain place

And whitherward to wend I wot not, by God's grace!
Nor would I miss my tryst at New Year, by my soul,
For all the land of Logres! Christ help me to my goal!
Therefore Sir Host, I now require ye without fail
To tell me here in truth if ye e'er heard a tale
Told of a Chapel Green? Where such a place may be?
The knight who keepeth it, green too, I ween, is he;
We sware a forward fast, I trow, between us twain,
That I that man would meet, might I thereto attain,
And to that same New Year but few days now remain —
Now fainer far would I behold that self-same knight,
If so it were God's will, than any gladder sight;
Therefore with your good will, I needs must wend my way
Since I have, for my quest, but three bare days alway;
Fainer were I to die than fail in this my quest —'
Then, laughing, quoth the lord: 'Of needs must be my guest,
I 'll shew to thee thy goal ere yet the term be o'er
That very Chapel Green — so vex thy soul no more,
Do thou in bed abide and take thine ease, I pray,
Until the fourth day dawn, with New Year go thy way
And thou shalt reach thy goal ere yet it be midday.
So, still,
To the New Year abide
Then rise, thy goal is near
Men shall thee thither guide,
'T is not two miles from here —'

XXIII

Sir Gawain, he was glad, and laughed out gay and free,
'I thank ye, Sire, for this, o'er all your courtesie,
Achieved is this my quest, and I shall, at your will
Within your burg abide, and do your pleasure still.'
The lord, he took that knight, and set him at his side,
And bade the ladies come to cheer them at that tide,
Tho' they had, of themselves, fair solace, verily —
The host, for very joy, he jested merrily
As one for meed of mirth scarce wist what he might say.
Then, turning to the knight, he cried on him alway:
'Didst swear to do the deed I should of thee request,
Now art thou ready here to hearken my behest?'
'Yea, Sire, forsooth am I,' so quoth that hero true
'While in your burg I bide, servant am I to you!'
'Now,' quoth the host, 'methinks, your travail sore hath been,
Here hast thou waked with me, nor had thy fill, I ween,
Of sustenance, or sleep, — an thou thine host wouldst please
Thou shalt lie long in bed, and, lingering, take thine ease
At morn, nor rise for mass, but eat as thou shalt say
E'en when thou wilt, my wife with thee a while shall stay
And solace thee with speech, till I my homeward way
have found,
For I betimes shall rise,
A-hunting am I bound.'
Gawain, this, his device
Doth grant him at that stound.

XXIV

'First,' quoth the host, 'we'll make a forward fair and free,
Whate'er in wood I win the profit thine shall be,
What cheer thou shalt achieve, shalt give me, 'gainst my gain;
Now swear me here with truth to keep this 'twixt us twain
Whate'er our hap may be, or good or ill befall.—'
'By God,' quoth good Gawain, 'I grant ye this withal,
An such play pleaseth you, forsooth it pleaseth me—'
'Now, bring the beverage here, the bargain set shall be.'
So quoth the castle's lord, and each one laughed, I trow,
They drank and dallied there and dealt with sport enow,
Those lords and ladies fair, e'en as it liked them best,
And so, in friendship fair, with many a courteous jest,
They stood, and stayed awhile, and spake with softest speech,
Then kissed at parting, e'en as courtesy doth teach.
And then, with service fit, and many a torch alight,
Unto his bed at last they brought each gallant knight again—
Yet ere their couch they sought
The cov'nant 'twixt the twain
The lord to memory brought,
For jesting was he fain.

BOOK III

I

Full early ere 't was day the folk arise withal,
The guests would go their way — upon their grooms they call,
They busk them busily to saddle each good steed,
The girths they tighten there, and truss the mails at need.
The nobles, ready all, in riding gear arrayed,
Leapt lightly to their steeds, their hand on bridle laid;
Each wight upon his way doth at his will ride fast —
The lord of all the land, I wot, was not the last,
Ready for riding he, with his men, at that same
Ate a sop hastily whenas from mass they came.
With blast of bugle bold forth upon bent he 'ld go,
Ere yet the day had dawned on the cold earth below.
He and his knights bestrode, each one, their horses high.
The huntsmen couple then the hounds right speedily.
Then, calling on the dogs, unclose the kennel door;
A bugle blast they blow, but three notes, and no more.
Loudly the brachets bay, and wake the echoes there,
They check their hounds so good who to the chase would fare
A hundred men all told, so doth the tale declare
ride fast;
The trackers on the trail
The hounds, uncoupled, cast,

Thro' forest, hill and dale
Rings loud the bugle blast.

II

At the first warning note that bade the hunt awake
The deer within the dale for dread they needs must quake;
Swift to the heights they hie — but soon must turn about,
The men in ambush hid so loud they cry and shout.
The harts, with heads high-held, they pass in safety there,
E'en so the stately stags with spreading antlers fair,
(For so the lords' command at close time of the year
That none should lift his hand save 'gainst the female deer.)
The hinds with '*Hag*'! and '*War*' they hold the lines within,
The does are driven back to dale with deafening din;
Swift as they speed, I trow, fair shooting might ye see,
The arrows striking true as 'neath the boughs they flee;
Their broad heads deeply wound, and, smitten on the flank,
The bleeding deer they fall, dying, upon the bank.
The hounds, in hasty course, follow upon the trail,
Huntsmen, with sounding horns, for speed they do not fail,
Follow with ringing cries that cliffs might cleave in twain;
The deer that 'scape the darts, they by the dogs are ta'en,
Run down, and riven, and rent, within the bounds so wide,
Harassed upon the hill, worried by waterside;
The men well knew their craft of forest and of flood,
The greyhounds were full swift to follow thro' the wood,
They caught them ere the men with arrows, as they stood,

could smite —
The lord was glad and gay,
His lance he wielded light,
With joy he passed the day
Till fell the shades of night.

III

The lord, he maketh sport beneath the woodland bough, —
Sir Gawain, that good knight, in bed he lieth now,
Hiding, while daylight gleamed upon the walls without,
'Neath costly cov'ring fair, curtained all round about.
As he half slumbering lay, it seeméd to his ear
A small sound at his door all sudden must he hear;
His head a little raised above the covering soft,
He grasps the curtain's edge, and lifteth it aloft,
And waiteth warily to wot what fate may hold —
It was the lady fair, most lovely to behold!
Gently she drew the door behind her, closing tight,
And came toward the couch—shamed was that gallant knight,
He laid him lightly down, and made as tho' he slept;
So stole she to his side, and light and soft she stept,
The curtain upward cast, within its fold she crept,
And there upon his bed her seat she soft doth take
Waiting in patience still until that he awake.
Cautious and quiet, awhile the knight, half hidden, lay,
And in his conscience conned the case with care alway;
What might the meaning be? He marvelled much, I trow,

Yet quoth within himself: 'It were more seemly now
To speak with gentle speech, ask what her will may be, —'
So made he feint to wake, and turned him presently
Lifted his eyelids then, and stared, as in amaze,
Made of the Cross the sign, that so his words and ways
be wise —
Her chin and cheeks are sweet
In red and white devise,
Gracious, she doth him greet
With laughing lips and eyes.

IV

'Good-morrow, Sir Gawain,' so spake the lady fair,
'A careless sleeper ye, I came ere ye were ware,
Now are ye trapped and ta'en, as ye shall truly know,
I 'll bind ye in your bed ere that ye hence should go!'
Laughing, the lady lanced her jests at him alway,
Sir Gawain answered blithe: 'Give ye good-morrow gay,
Know I am at your will, (forsooth it pleaseth me)
And here for grace I yearn, yielding me readily.
For where one needs must yield to do so swift were best!'
And thus he answer made, with many a merry jest;
'But might I, Lady fair, find grace before your eyes,
Then loose, I pray, your bonds, and bid your prisoner rise,
I 'ld get me from this bed, and better clad, I trow,
I in your converse kind comfort would find enow.'
'Nay, nay, forsooth, beau Sire,' so quoth that lady sweet,

'Ye shall not rise from bed, I 'll rede ye counsel meet,
For I shall hold ye here, since other may not be,
And talk with this my knight, who captive is to me,
For well I know, in sooth, ye are that same Gawain
Worshipped by all the world where ye to fare be fain;
For all your honour praise, your gracious courtesie,
Or lords or ladies fair, all men on earth that be!
Now are ye here, I wis, and all alone we twain,
My lord to fare afield with his free folk is fain,
The men, they lie abed, so do my maidens all —
The door is safely shut, and closed and hasped withal;
Since him whom all men praise I in my hand hold fast,
I well will use my time the while the chance doth last!
Now rest,
My body's at your will
To use as ye think best,
Perforce, I find me still
Servant to this my guest!'

V

'In good faith,' quoth Gawain, 'I now bethink me well,
I be not such an one as this your tale would tell!
To reach such reverence as ye rehearse but now
I all unworthy were — that do I soothly vow!
Yet, God wot, I were glad, an so ye thought it good,
If I in word and deed here at your service stood;
To pleasure this your prayer, a pure joy 't were to me.'

'In good faith, Sir Gawain,' the lady answered free,
'The prowess and the praise that please us ladies fair
I lack not, nor hold light, but little gain it were —
Ladies there be enow to whom it were more dear
To hold their knight in hold, e'en as I hold ye here,
To dally daintily with courteous words and fair
That bring them comfort good, and cure them of their care,
Than wealth of treasure told, or gold they own withal —
But now I praise the Lord who here upholdeth all
Him whom they all desire is in my hold and hall
of grace!'
She made him such good cheer
That lady fair of face,
The knight was fain to hear
And answer, in his place.

VI

He quoth: 'Now Mary Maid reward ye, as she may,
I find your frankness fair and noble, sooth to say.
Full many folk, I trow, have well entreated me,
Yet greater honour far than all their courtesie
I count your praise, who naught save goodness here shall know.'
'By Mary Maid,' she quoth, 'methinks it is not so,
For were my worth above all women who may live,
And all of this world's wealth were in mine hand to give,
And I were free of choice a lord to choose to me,

Then, for the customs good I in this knight must see,
For beauty debonaire, for bearing blithe and gay,
For all that I have heard, and hold for truth alway,
Upon no man on mold save ye my choice were laid.'
'I wot well,' quoth the knight, 'a better choice ye made!
Yet am I proud of this, the praise, ye give to me,
My sovereign ye, and I your servant, verily,
Do yield me here your knight, and may Christ ye repay!'
They spake of many things till noon had passed away,
And aye the lady made mien that she loved him well,
And aye he turned aside her sweet words as they fell,
For were she brightest maid of maidens to his mind,
The less love would he shew, since loss he thought to find
anon —
The blow that should him slay,
And for his blow was boon —
The lady leave did pray,
He granted her, full soon.

VII

Then, as she gave 'good-day,' she laughed with glance so gay,
And, standing, spake a word that 'stonied him alway:
'May He who speedeth speech reward thee well, I trow,
But that ye be Gawain I much misdoubt me now,' —
'And wherefore?' quoth the knight in fashion frank and fair
Fearing lest he have failed in custom debonaire:
The lady blessed him then, and spake as in this wise:

'Gawain so good a knight is holden in all eyes,
So clad in courtesie is he, in sooth, that ne'er
Had he thus holden speech for long with lady fair
But he had craved a kiss by this, his courtesie,
Or trifling token ta'en at end of converse free!'
Then quoth Gawain: 'Ywis, if this ye fitting deem
I 'll kiss at your command, as doth a knight beseem
Who tarrieth to ask, and doth refusal fear —'
She clasped him in her arms, e'en as she stood anear,
Lightly she bent adown, and kissed that knight so free,
Commending him to Christ, as he her, courteously —
Then, without more ado, forth from the door she went;
The knight made haste to rise, on speed was he intent,
He called his chamberlain, his robes he chose anon,
When he was fitly garbed to mass he blithe has gone;
Then sat him down to meat, 't was served in fitting guise,
Merry he passed the day, and, till the moon did rise
made game —
Better was never knight
Entreated of fair dame
Old, or of beauty bright,
Than he was, at that same.

VIII

And aye the lord in land finds sport unto his mind,
Hunting o'er hill and heath, chasing the barren hind,
So many hath he slain, ere yet the sun was low,

Of does, and other deer, a wonder 't was to know.
The folk together flock, whenas the end drew near
Quickly a quarry make of all the slaughtered deer;
The best, they bowed thereto, with many a knight to aid,
The fairest hinds of grease together they have laid,
Set them to quartering there, e'en as the need doth ask,
The fat was set aside by those who knew their task,
From all uncleanness freed, the flesh they sever there,
The chest they slit, and draw the erber forth with care;
With knife both sharp and keen the neck they next divide,
Then sever all four limbs, and strip off fair the hide.
The belly open slit, the bowels aside they lay,
With swift strokes of the knife the knot they cut away;
They grip the gargiloun, and speedily divide
Weasand and wind-pipe then, the guts are cast aside,
The shoulder-blade around, with blade so sharp and keen,
They cut, and leave the side whole and untouched, I ween.
The breast they deftly carve, the halves they lie a-twin,
And with the gargiloun their work they now begin;
They rip it swiftly up, and take it clean away,
Void the avancers out, and then, methinks, straightway
The skin betwixt the ribs they cut in fashion fair
Till they have left them all e'en to the backbone bare.
So come they to the haunch, that doth belong thereto,
They bear it up all whole, and cleanly cut it thro'
That, with the numbles, take, alike they be the two,

of kind —
Then, where the thighs divide
The flaps they cut behind,
And thus, on either side,
Thighs from the back unbind.

IX

Then head and neck alike, they hew them off with heed,
The sides from off the chine are sundered now with speed.
The corbie's fee they cast into the wood hard by,
Each thick side thro' the ribs they pierce it, verily,
And hang them all aloft, fixed to the haunches fair —
Each fellow for his fee doth take as fitting there.
Then, on a deer's skin spread, they give the hounds their
food.
The liver, lights, and paunch, to keep the custom good,
And bread soaked in the blood they scatter 'mid the pack —
The hounds, they bay amain, nor bugle blast doth lack.
Thus, with the venison good, they take the homeward way,
Sounding upon their horns a merry note and gay.
By that, the day was done, the folk, with eventide,
That comely castle sought, wherein their guest doth bide
full still —
To bliss and firelight bright
The lord is come at will;
To meet that goodly knight —
Of joy they had their fill!

X

Then at the lord's command, the folk they thither call,
Quickly the ladies come, and maidens, one and all,
And there before the folk he bids his men straightway,
The venison they have brought before them all to lay.
And then, in goodly jest, he calleth Sir Gawain,
The tale of that day's sport he to rehearse is fain,
Shews him how fair the fat upon the ribs, sharp shorn,
And quoth: 'How seemeth this? Have I won praise this morn?
Am I, thro' this my craft, worthy of praise from thee?'
'Yea, soothly,' quoth Gawain, 'the fairest game I see
That I in winter-time have seen this seven year!'
'And all this,' quoth his host, 'Gawain, I give thee here
By covenant and accord, the whole thou well may'st claim.'
''T is sooth,' then said the knight, 'I grant ye at this same;
Won have I worthily a prize, these walls within
Which, with as good a will, ye now from me must win.'
With that he clasps his arms around his neck so fair
And in right comely wise he kissed him then and there,
'Now here hast thou my gain, no more hath fallen to me —
I trow had it been more my gift were none less free!'
''T is good,' quoth the good knight, 'nor shall my thanks be
slow
Yet might it better be, an I the truth might know,
Where thou didst win this grace, or by thy wit or no?'
'Ask no more,' quoth Gawain, 'so did our forward stand,
Since ye have ta'en your right no more may ye demand.'

At will
They laughed and made them gay
With many a jest I trow,
To supper go straightway,
With dainties new enow.

XI

Then by the hearth they sit, on silken cushions soft,
And wine, within those walls, I wot, they serve full oft,
And, ever, as they jest, come morrow morn, they say
That forward they 'll fulfil which they had kept to-day.
What chance soe'er betide, they will exchange their gain
When they at nightfall meet, be much or little ta'en.
This covenant they accord, in presence of the court,
And beverage to the board at that same time was brought,
A courteous leave, at last, doth each from other take,
And each man for his bed himself doth ready make.
The cock at early morn, had crowed and cackled thrice
When swift, the lord arose, with him his knights of price;
They hearken mass, and meat, with service fit, they bring,
Then forth to forest fare ere yet the day doth spring
for chace —
With sound of hunter's horns
O'er plain they swiftly pace,
Uncoupled midst the thorns
Each hound doth run on race.

XII

Full soon they strike the scent, hard by a rock withal,
Huntsmen cheer on those hounds who first upon it fall,
Loudly, with whirling words, and clamour rising high,
The hounds that heard the call haste hither at the cry.
Fast on the scent they fall, full forty at that tide,
Till of the pack the cry was heard both far and wide.
So fiercely rose their bay, the rocks, they rang again,
The huntsmen with their horns to urge them on were fain.
Then, sudden, all the pack together crowd and cry
Before a thicket dense, beneath a crag full high,
Hard by the water's edge — the pack, with one consent,
Run to the rugged rocks, which lie all scarred and rent.
Hounds to the finding fare, the men, they follow keen,
And cast about the crag, and rocks that lie between.
The knights, full well they knew what beast had here its lair
And fain would drive it forth before the bloodhounds there.
Then on the bush they beat, and bid the game uprise —
With sudden rush across the beaters, out there hies
A great and grisly boar, most fearsome to behold,
The herd he long had left, for that he waxed full old.
Of beast, and boar, methinks, biggest and fiercest he,
I trow me at his grunt full many grieved must be;
Three at the first assault prone on the earth he threw,
And sped forth at best speed, nor other harm they knew.
Then Hey! and Hey! the knights halloo with shout and cry,

Huntsmen with horn to mouth send forth shrill notes and high,
Merry the noise of men and dogs, I ween, that tide
Who followed on the boar — with boastful shout they cried to stay —
The hounds' wrath would he quell
Oft as he turned to bay,
Loudly they yelp and yell,
His tusks they tare alway.

XIII

The men make ready then their arrows sharp and keen,
The darts they swiftly fly, oft is he hit, I ween,
But never point may pierce, nor on his hide have hold,
And never barb may bite his forehead's fearsome fold.
The shafts are splintered there, shivered, they needs must fall,
The heads, they bit indeed, yet but rebound withal.
But when he felt the blows, tho' harmless all they fell,
Then, mad for rage, he turned, and 'venged him passing well;
He rushed upon the knights, and wounded them full sore
Until, for very fear, they fled his face before.
The lord, on steed swift-paced, doth follow on his track,
Blowing his bugle loud, nor valour doth he lack,
Thus thro' the wood he rides, his horn rings loud and low,
Upon the wild boar's track until the sun was low.
And so the winter's day he passeth on this wise

The while his goodly guest in bed, 'neath covering lies,
Sir Gawain bides at home — In gear of rich devise
and hue,
The dame made no delay
To greet her knight so true,
Early she took her way
To test his mood anew.

XIV

She to the curtain comes, and looks upon the knight,
Gawain doth greet her there in fitting wise and right;
She greeteth him again, ready of speech is she,
Soft seats her at his side, and laughs full merrily.
Then, with a smiling glance these words to him doth say:
'Sir, an ye be Gawain I marvel much alway,
So stern ye be when one would goodly ye entreat,
Of courteous company ignore the customs meet,
An one be fain to teach, swift from your mind they 're brought—
Since all forgotten now what yesterday I taught
By truest tokens all, that well might be, I trow.'
'What is that?' quoth Gawain, 'naught I remember now,
But if 't is sooth ye speak, then blame I needs must bear.'
'Of kissing was my rede;' so quoth the lady fair,
'When countenance be known, swiftly a kiss to claim,
That doth become a knight who beareth courteous name!'
'Nay, cease, my dear, such speech,' so quoth the gallant
knight,

'A kiss I dare not claim, lest ye deny my right,
For an ye did forbid, to take, I trow, were wrong —'
'I' faith,' in merry wise she spake, 'ye be too strong,
Ye may not be forbid, since ye may take with might
An any do such wrong as to deny thy right!'
'Yea,' quoth Gawain, 'by Christ, your speech it soundeth well,
But threats shall little thrive in that land where I dwell,
Nor count we fair a gift that is not proffered free —
I am at your command, to kiss, if so shall be
Your will — to take or leave, as seemeth good to ye.'
With grace,
She bent, that lady fair,
And gently kissed his face.
They hold sweet converse there,
Of love-themes speak a space.

XV

'Fain would I ask of ye, (that lady questioned free)
If so ye were not wroth, what may the reason be
That one so young and fair, as ye be at this tide,
For knightly courtesie renowned both far and wide,
Who of all chivalry the head and chief men hold,
Versed in the lore of love, and warfare, fierce and bold —
Since each true knight doth tell how he did venture dare
(This token and this sign his deeds perforce must bear)
How for a lady's love his life at stake he set,
And for her favour fair full doleful dints hath met,

With valour 'venged her wrongs, and cured her of her care
Brought bliss unto her bower, and did her bounties share —
And ye be comeliest knight of this, your land and time,
Your worship and your words be famed in every clime,
And I, two mornings long have sat beside ye here
Yet never from your mouth a word came to mine ear
That ever dealt with love, in measure less or more;
But ye, so courteous held, so skilled in all such lore,
Surely to one so young as I should swiftly shew
And teach some token sure, whereby true love to know.
Are ye unlearnéd then, whom men so highly prize?
Or am I all too dull for dalliance, in your eyes?
For shame!
Hither I come and sit
To learn, as at this same;
So teach me of your wit,
While sport my lord doth claim!'

XVI

'In good faith,' quoth Gawain, 'your good deeds God repay,
For goodly is my glee, my profit great alway;
That one so fair as ye doth deign betake ye here
To please so poor a man, and me, your knight, to cheer
With kindly countenance, in sooth doth please me well —
But that I, in my turn, should here of true love tell,
And take that for my theme, (or tales of gallant knight)
And teach ye, who I wot, doth wield more skilful sleight

In such arts by the half, or hundred-fold indeed,
Than I, long as I live on earth may win for meed,
'T were folly all indeed, sweet lady, by my fay!
Your will in troth I 'll work in such wise as I may,
As duteous I am bound — and ever more will do
Your service faithfully, God grant me grace thereto!'
Thus did she ask him fair, and oft did test and try,
To win him here to woo, whate'er her will thereby —
But he doth fend him fair, nor ill hath done, I ween,
And never deed of wrong hath chanced the twain between,
but bliss —
They laugh and talk amain,
At last she doth him kiss,
Her leave of him hath ta'en,
And gone her way, I wis.

XVII

Then doth Sir Gawain rise, and robe him, mass to hear.
Then was the dinner dight, and served with mickle cheer;
Thus, with the ladies twain, in sport the day he spent,
The while the lord doth chase the boar o'er bank and bent —
Follows the grisly swine, as o'er the holts it sped,
With broken back, his hounds, beneath its jaws fall dead.
The boar would bide at bay, the bowmen grant no grace,
But force him 'gainst his will once more his foes to face.
So fast the arrows fly, the folk they gather round,
Yet huntsmen stiff and stern, he startles at that stound.

Till spent with flight, at last, he may no further win,
But hies him in all haste, until a hole within
A mound, beside a rock, hard by the brooklet's flow,
He gains — then turns at bay, tearing the ground below.
His jaws, they foam and froth, unseemly to behold,
He whets his tusks so white — was never man so bold
Of those who faced him there, who dare the issue try;
They eye him from afar, but none will venture nigh.
Right wroth,
Many he smote before,
Thus all might well be loath
To face the tusks that tore —
So mad was he, i-troth.

XVIII

Then cometh swift the lord, spurring his goodly steed,
See'th the boar at bay, of his men taketh heed;
He lighteth from his horse, leaves it with hanging rein,
Draws out his blade so bright, and strideth forth amain.
Fast does he ford the stream, the boar bides on the strand,
'Ware of the gallant wight, with weapon fast in hand;
His bristles rise amain, grim were his snarls withal,
The folk were sore afraid, lest harm their lord befall.
The swine, with spring so swift, upon the hero fell,
That boar and baron bold none might asunder tell,
There, in the water deep, the boar, he had the worst,
For the man marked him well, e'en as they met at first,

His sharp blade in the slot he set, e'en to the heft,
And, driving hard and true, the heart asunder cleft,
Snarling, he yields his hold, the stream him hence hath reft.
Forthright,
The hounds, with fierce onslaught
Fall to, the boar they bite,
Swift to the shore he's brought,
And dogs to death him dight.

XIX

Forthwith from many a horn a joyful blast they blow,
Huntsmen together vie, high rings the loud 'Hallo!'
The brachets bay their best, e'en at their masters' will,
Who in that fearsome chace had proved their hunters' skill.
And then a wight so wise in woodcraft, fit and fair,
The quarry to unlace hath set him straightway there.
He heweth off the head, and setteth it on high,
With skill he rendeth down the backbone, presently,
Then, bringing forth the bowels, roasts them on embers red,
And, to reward his hounds, doth blend them with their bread.
He strippeth off the brawn, e'en as in shields it were,
The hastlets hath he ta'en, and drawn them forth with care.
The halves he taketh now, and binds them as a whole,
With withy stiff and stout, made fast unto a pole.
And with that self-same swine homeward they fare thro' land;
The boar's head do they bear before their lord, on brand,
Who slew him in the ford, by force of his right hand

so strong —
Till he might see Gawain
In hall, he deemed it long,
His guest he was full fain
To pay, nor do him wrong.

XX

The lord, with merry jest, and laugh of gladsome glee
Soon as he saw Gawain, spake words both fair and free,
(The ladies too he bade, e'en with the household all —)
The boar's shields doth he show, and tells his tale withal,
How broad he was, how long, how savage in his mood,
That grisly swine — and how they chased him thro' the wood,
Sir Gawain doth commend his deeds, in comely wise,
Well hath he proved himself, to win so fair a prize —
'For such a brawny beast, (so spake that baron bold)
And such shields of a swine, mine eyes did ne'er behold.'
They handle the huge head, the knight doth praise it well,
And loud and fair his speech, his host his mind may tell.
'Gawain,' quoth the good man, 'this gain is sure your own,
By forward fair and fast, e'en as before was shown.'
'Yea,' quoth the knight, ''t is true, and here too, by my troth,
I give ye all my gain, nor thereto am I loth.'
With that he clasped his host, and doth him kindly kiss,
And so a second time he did the same, I wis.
'Now are we,' quoth Gawain, 'quit in this eventide
Of forwards all we made since I with ye abide

in hall.'
The lord quoth: 'By Saint Giles,
I hold ye best withal,
Rich are ye in short, while
Your profits be not small!'

XXI

The tables then they bring, on trestles set aloft,
And cover them as meet, with cloths both fair and soft,
Clear falleth on the walls, of waxen torch, the light;
Sithen, to service fair they set them, many a knight.
Then clamour glad, and glee, arose within the hall,
Where flares the flame on floor they make much mirth withal,
They sing, e'en as they sup, and after, knights so true,
Fair songs of Christmas-tide, and many a carol new,
With every kind of mirth that man to tell were fain —
And by that lady's side he sat, the good Gawain,
Such semblance fair she made, in seemly wise and meet,
To please the gentle knight, with stolen glances sweet,
Whereat he marvelled much, and chid himself amain,
Yet, for his courtesy, would answer not again,
Dealing in dainty wise, till fate the die was fain
to cast.
Thus made they mirth in hall,
Long as their will did last,
Then, when the lord did call,
To chimney-corner passed.

XXII

They drank, and dallied, there, and deemed 't were well to hold
Their forward fast and fair till New Year's Eve were told,
But Gawain prayed his leave, with morrow's morn to ride,
Since it were nigh the term his challenge to abide.
The lord withheld his leave, praying him strait to stay:
'As I be faithful knight, I pledge my troth alway
Thou shalt thy tryst fulfil, there at the Chapel Green,
Before the New Year's Morn hath waxed to prime, I ween;
So lie, and rest thee soft, and take thine ease at will,
And I shall hunt the holts, and keep our forward still,
To change my gain with thee, all that I homeward bear —
Twice have I tested thee, and found thee true and fair,
A third time will we try our luck, at dawn of day;
Now think ye upon joy, be merry while ye may,
For men may laugh at loss, if so their will alway.'
Gawain doth grant the grace, and saith, he will abide;
Blithely they brought him drink, and then to bed they hied with light —
Sir Gawain lies and sleeps
Soft, thro' the stilly night,
The lord his cov'nant keeps,
For chase is early dight.

XXIII

A morsel after mass, he taketh with his men,
Merry the morning tide — his mount he prayeth then,
They who, a-horse, should hold him company that day
A-saddle all, their steeds before the hall-gate stay.
Full fair it was a-field, the frost yet fast doth cling,
Ruddy, and red, the sun its rising beams doth fling,
And clear, and cloudless all, appears the welkin wide —
The huntsmen scatter them hard by a woodland side,
The rocks, they rang again before the horn's loud blast,
Some fell upon a track, where late a fox had passed —
(The trail may oft betray, tho' fox no feint doth lack —)
A hound hath found the scent, the hunt is on his track,
The dogs, they follow fast, and thick the hue and cry,
They run in rabble rout on the trail speedily
The fox, he fled apace, the hounds their prey have seen,
And, once within their sight, they follow fast and keen,
Loudly they threaten there, with cry and clamour fierce —
The fox, with twist and turn, the undergrowth doth pierce,
Winding, and hearkening oft, low thro' the hedge doth creep,
Then, by a little ditch, doth o'er a spinney leap,
So, still, he stealeth forth, by rough and rugged way
Thinking to clear the wood, and cheat the hounds that day;
Then, ere he wist, I trow, to hunters' tryst he came
Threatened he was threefold, by hounds as at that same:
from fray
He starteth swift aside,

And fled, as he were fey;
Fain was he at that tide
To seek the woodland way.

XXIV

'Twas lively then to list the hounds, as loud they cry,
When all the pack had met, and mingled, speedily,
Such wrath, methinks, adown upon his head they call
As all the climbing cliffs had clashed unto their fall.
Hunters, with loud 'Halloo,' sight of their prey do hail,
Loudly they chide the fox, nor scolding speech doth fail,
Threaten him once and oft, and 'thief' they call him there —
The hounds are on his trail, tarry he may not dare,
Oft would they him out-run, and head him ere he passed,
Double again he must — wily the fox, and fast,
Thus, by his skill he led master and huntsmen bold
O'er hill, o'er dale, by mount, by woodland, and by wold;
While the good knight at home doth soundly sleep, I ween,
All comely curtained round, on morning cold and keen.
But Love the lady fair had suffered not to sleep,
That purpose to impair which she in heart doth keep.
Quickly she rose her up, and thither took her way
In mantle meet enwrapped, which swept the ground alway.
Within, 't was finely furred, and bordered with the same,
No gold doth bind her head but precious stones, aflame,
Within her tresses wound, by twenties cluster fair;
Her face, and eke her throat, the mantle leaveth bare,

Bare is her snow-white breast, and bare her back to sight;
Passing the chamber door, she shuts it close and tight —
Setting the window wide, she calls her knight alway,
And, laughing, chideth him in merry words and gay,
With cheer,
'Ah, man! Why dost thou sleep?
The morn dawns fair and clear,'
Gawain, in slumber deep,
Dreaming, her voice did hear.

XXV

Drowsing, he dreamed, the knight, a dream with travail fraught,
As men, in morning hours, are plagued with troubled thought;
How destiny, next morn, his weird should duly dight,
When, at the Chapel Green, he needs must meet that knight,
And there his buffet bide, nor make there for debate —
But, came that comely dame, his wits he summoned straight,
Aroused him from his sleep, and spake full speedily;
That lady drew anigh, sweet was her smile to see —
She bent her o'er his face, and kissed him, fair and free.
A greeting fit he gave, in words of gladsome cheer,
So glorious her guise, clad in such goodly gear,
Her features faultless all, her colour fair and fine,
The springs of joy well free, warming his heart like wine;
Their seemly smiles full swift were smitten into mirth,
Bliss, and good fellowship, betwixt the twain to birth

did win —
Their words were fair and good,
Weal reigned those walls within,
Yet peril 'twixt them stood,
Nor might she nearer win.

XXVI

She pressed that prince of price so close, I trow, that day,
Leaning so nigh her point, that need upon him lay
To take her proffered love, or roughly say her nay —
For courtesy his care, lest he be craven knight,
And more, lest mischief fall, in that he sin outright,
And thus betray his host, the lord of house and hall, —
'God shield me,' quoth the knight, 'that e'er such chance
befall!'
Forthwith, with laughter light, he strove to lay aside
All speech of special grace her lips might speak that tide;
Then quoth she to the knight: 'I hold ye worthy blame
An ye love not that life which here your love doth claim,
And lieth wounded here, above all else on earth,
Save ye a true love have ye hold of better worth,
And to that lady fair your faith so fast ye hold,
Ye may not list my words — Save *ye* that tale have told
That will I not believe — I pray ye, of a sooth,
For all the love on life, hide not from me the truth
for guile?'
The knight quoth: 'By Saint John,

(And gaily did he smile)
Of true love have I none,
Nor will I, for a while!'

XXVII

'That word,' the lady quoth, 'methinks hath grieved me more,
Yet I my answer take, altho' I sorrow sore;
But kiss me kindly now, ere yet I go my way
My fate to mourn on mould, as she who loveth may.'
Sighing, she swayed adown, and kissed the knight so good,
Then raised her up again, and spake e'en as she stood:
'At this our parting, dear, grant me this grace for love,
Give me somewhat as gift, if it be but thy glove,
That I may think on thee, and so my grief may still —'
'Now, I wis,' quoth the knight, 'I would I had at will,
The thing I hold on earth most precious, it were thine,
Ye have deserved, I trow, by friendship fair and fine,
A guerdon goodlier far than I might e'er bestow!
But here, by gift of love, small profit might ye know,
Nor were ye honoured now, had ye at this time aught
Or glove, or other gift, from Gawain, as ye sought;
Here thro' the land I fare on errand strange and dread,
No men have I with mails, or trinkets, at this stead,
That much misliketh me, lady, for this thy sake,
Yet, be 't for good or ill, each man his chance must take
aright —'
'Thou knight of honour, nay'

(So spake the lady bright),
'Tho' no gift be my pay
Somewhat I 'll give my knight.'

XXVIII

She proffered him a ring, of red gold fashioned fair,
A sparkling stone, I trow, aloft the setting bare,
Its gleam, in sooth, outshone the sunlight's ruddy ray,
I wot well that its worth no man might lightly pay.
Gawain the ring refused, and readily he spake:
'No gift, my lady gay, of goodwill will I take,
Since I have naught to give naught will I take of thee —'
Straitly she prayed, Gawain refused her steadfastly,
Sware swiftly on his sooth, that ring he would not take —
The lady, sorely grieved, in this wise further spake:
'An ye refuse my ring, methinks, the cause shall be
Ye deem ye were too much beholden unto me,
I'll here my girdle give as lesser gift this tide —'
She loosed a silken lace that hung low at her side,
Upon her kirtle knit, beneath her mantle's fold,
With green silk was it gay, entwined with threads of gold,
Braided in cunning wise, by skilful fingers wrought;
She proffered it the knight, and blithely him besought
To take this as her gift, tho' worthless all it were —
But still he said her nay, and, ever steadfast, sware
He would nor gift nor gold, ere God would give him grace
Well to achieve the chance t'wards which he set his face —

'Therefore, I pray ye now, be not displeased at this,
But let the matter be, I may not grant, I wis,
thy prayer —
Much do I owe to thee
For this, thy gentle care,
By heat, by cold, I'll be
Thy servant everywhere.'

XXIX

'Do ye refuse this silk,' so quoth the gentle dame,
'For its simplicity? I grant ye of that same;
Lo! light it is to hold, and less its cost, I ween,
Yet who the virtue knew that knit therein hath been,
Would peradventure prize it higher for its grace —
Whoso shall gird himself with this same woven lace
The while 't is knotted well around him, 't is a charm,
And no man upon mould may wreak him hurt or harm,
And ne'er may he be slain by magic, or by spell —'
Sir Gawain, in his heart, that hour bethought him well,
That lace a jewel were against the jeopardy
Which, at the Chapel Green, did wait him presently,
Might he escape un-slain, the sleight he deemed were good;
Thus suffered he her prayer, and shewed a gentler mood.
She pressed on him her gift, and urged him loud and still,
He granted her the grace, she gave it of good will,
And, for her sake, besought he tell the matter ne'er,
But hide it from her lord, he sware it fast and fair,

That no man, save them twain, should this, their secret, share
for naught —
He thanked her oft, I wis,
Joyful of heart and thought,
Her true knight did she kiss
Thrice, ere she leave besought.

XXX

Then, laughing, saith, 'Farewell,' and from the room doth go
For more mirth of that man, I wot, she may not know;
When she hath gone, Gawain doth from his couch arise,
And swiftly robes himself in rich and royal wise,
Taketh the love-lace green, his lady's gift so fair,
That wound around his waist he doth well hidden bear.
Then to the chapel, swift, the knight doth take his way,
And, seeking out a priest, he privily doth pray
He may his life unfold, that he may better know
How his soul may be saved, when he from hence shall go.
Shrived was he surely there — he shewed his misdeeds all,
Or less they be or more, and did for mercy call,
Then, from the listening priest, doth absolution pray —
Assoiléd well he was, and set as clean alway
As if the morrow's morn the day of doom should be.
Sithen he makes good cheer amid the ladies free,
With comely carols there, all joys men may devise,
(As ne'er before that day, methinks, had been his wise)
with bliss —

That all men marvelled there
And said of him, I wis,
Such semblance gay he ware
As none had seen ere this.

XXXI

Now let him linger there where love his share shall be —
The lord is yet afield, leading his folk so free,
Now hath he slain the fox, that he hath chased all day —
As he thro' spinney sped, eager to spy his prey,
There, where he heard the hounds that close on his track lay,
Lo! Reynard, running low, thro' tangled grove he steals,
And all the yelping pack of hounds are at his heels.
The knight, he saw the beast, and would his coming wait,
Drew forth his brand so bright, and flung it swift and straight,
The fox, the sharp sword shunned, to swerve aside was fain,
A hound doth hold him fast ere he might turn again,
Beneath the horse's feet the pack upon him fell,
Worried their wily prey with many a yap and yell,
The lord, he lights adown, the fox he seizes there,
Swiftly he snatches him from out the jaws that tear,
Holding him high o'er head, he halloos loud and gay,
While many a gallant hound doth round him spring and bay.
Thither the huntsmen hie, their horns sound merrily,
Answering each to each, till all their master see.
That noble company, they gather fair and fast,
All who the bugle bare together blew a blast,

While they who had no horn, they halloo'd loud and clear;
It was the merriest meet that ever man might hear
The clamour that was raised o'er Reynard's doom so drear —
Then, gay,
The hounds they there reward,
Rubbing their heads that day —
Now have they ta'en Reynard
And stript his pelt away.

XXXII

And then they hied them home, for night-fall was full nigh,
Blowing a shattering blast on horn, with notes so high,
The lord at last alights before his home so dear,
A fire he finds on floor — his guest, he sitteth near,
Gawain the good, who glad and joyous was withal,
For, mid the ladies fair, bliss to his lot did fall.
He ware a robe of blue, e'en to the earth it fell,
His surcoat, softly furred, became him passing well;
Of self-same stuff, the hood upon his shoulders lay,
Bordered and bound the twain with fur alike that day.
His host he met forthwith, there, in the midmost hall,
A goodly greeting gave, and joyful spake withal;
'Now shall I first fulfil thy forward, mine and thine,
Which we together sware whenas ye spared no wine.'
With that he clasped the knight, and gave him kisses three,
Setting them on his lips with all solemnity.

'By Christ,' then quoth the host: 'good fortune your's hath
been,
If for such chance ye gave a fair exchange, I ween!'
'Thereof small need to speak —' the hero straightway said,
'Since light the cost, and swift, methinks, the price I paid.'
'By Mary,' quoth his host, 'in that am I behind,
I hunted all this day, and yet I naught might find
Save this foul fox's pelt, fiend take the thing alway,
Methinks for precious gifts the same were sorry pay,
And ye have rendered me three kisses here to-day
right good —'
'Enough,' quoth Sir Gawain,
'I thank ye, by the Rood.'
Then how the fox was slain
He told him as they stood.

XXXIII

Of mirth, of minstrelsy, of meat, they take their fill,
And make them merry there, as men may do at will,
With ladies' laughter light, and many a merry jest,
So joyful were the twain, the host, and his good guest,
E'en as they drunken were, or e'en had waxen fey —
The lord, and e'en his men made many a jest so gay,
Until at length the time for severance was o'er past,
Each baron to his bed betook him at the last.
Then first, Sir Gawain good, leave of his host would pray
Thanking him fair and free, and thus he spake alway:

'For this fair sojourning your honour be increased,
The High King grant ye this, I pray, at this high feast.
Your servant here am I, an so your will may be —
With morn I needs must fare, e'en as I told to ye,
A guide ye promised sure, to shew to me the way
To that same Chapel Green, where, on the New Year's Day
With God's will shall be dealt my doom, and this, my weird —'
'In good faith,' quoth the host, 'be not for that afeard,
Of good will shall I give all that to ye I hight —'
A servant then he called, to shew the way aright
Fair o'er the downs, that so Gawain should have no need
To wend by words, but through the copse, might make with speed
his way —
For gracious fare, Gawain,
With gracious words would pay,
And from the ladies twain
His leave was loth to pray.

XXXIV

Careful he kissed the twain, and spake them both full fair,
Well may they thrive for thanks he presseth on them there.
And in the selfsame wise those ladies make reply,
Commending him to Christ, with many a piteous sigh.
Then from the household all, in courteous wise he 'ld part,
And each man that he met, he thanked him from his heart

For service, solace fair, and for the pains they knew
In that they busied them to do him service true.
And all to say 'Farewell,' I trow, such sorrow felt
As if in worthy wise long years with him they 'd dwelt.
With torches burning bright, they to his chamber led,
And, that he well might rest, blithely brought him to bed.
But that he soundly slept, in sooth, I dare not say,
Matter enow had he, that came with dawning day
for thought —
Now let him lie there still,
He nigheth what he sought —
If hearken me ye will
I'll tell ye how they wrought.

BOOK IV

I

Now nigheth the New Year, past are the hours of night,
And, e'en as God doth will, darkness must yield to light,
But weather wild awakes e'en with the New Year's birth,
Aloft, the driving clouds cast the keen cold to earth,
Enow of North therein the naked wight to slay —
The snow, it smartly drave across the fells that day,
With whistling blast the wind doth whirl it from on high,
Till, in each dale, the drifts both wide and deep they lie.
The knight, he hearkened well, as in his bed he lay,

But, tho' his eyes were shut, little he slept alway.
By every cock that crew, the hour right well he knew,
And lightly gat him up, ere yet to dawn it drew,
For in the chamber burned a lamp that gave him light —
His chamberlain he called, who answered him forthright,
Bade him his byrnie bring, and saddle his good steed;
The other gat him up, and swiftly fetched his weed,
Then was Sir Gawain clad in fitting wise, and fair,
First, in his clothes he 's wrapt, the cold from him to 'ware,
Then he his harness doffs, that well was kept, I ween,
The plates, the coat of mail, alike are polished clean,
And of his byrnie rich, the rings from rust are freed,
'T was fresh as at the first — Of thanks, he fain full meed would bring —
He did on him each piece,
They lacked no burnishing,
Gayest from here to Greece,
His steed he bade them bring.

II

The while in richest weed he doth himself array,
His coat, with cognizance embroidered clear and gay,
On velvet, rich adorned, with stones of virtue high
Well wrought and bound, the seams embroidered cunningly,
And all, with fairest skins, within well furred and lined —
The lace, the lady's gift, he doth not leave behind,
Gawain forgat it not, since 't was for his own good —

He belted fast his brand around him as he stood,
Then twined the token twice, and drew it round him tight,
Well did that silken cord enswathe the goodly knight;
The girdle of green silk, in sooth, beseemed him well,
On cloth of royal red, its hues, they richly tell.
But for that girdle's grace he ware it not, the knight,
Nor for the pendants' pride, tho' polished they, and bright,
Nor for the glittering gold, whose gleam the ends doth light —
But 't was to save himself, when he must shortly stand
And bide without debate, from knife or glittering brand
a blow —
Now, armed, the goodly knight
Forth from the hall doth go,
On all who there be dight
His thanks he would bestow.

III

Ready was Gringalet, his charger great and tall,
Stabled the steed had been in fitting wise withal,
Eager to start, the horse delay might little brook —
The knight, he drew anear, and on his coat did look,
Spake softly to himself, and by his sooth he sware,
'The men within this moat for honour fitly care,
May they, with their good lord, all joy henceforward share,
And may love be her meed thro' life, that fair ladie,
Who thus a passing guest cherish for charitie,
And honour hold in hand — may He repay withal

Who rules on high, the folk within this goodly hall,
If I my life on land might somewhat longer lead
Then readily reward I 'ld give, as fits your meed —'
He to the stirrup steps, and doth his steed bestride,
Upon his shoulder lays his shield as fit, that tide,
Then spurreth Gringalet, anon, with spurs of gold,
The steed no longer stands, but on the stones so cold
doth dance —
Mounted, his squire doth bear
Aloft, his spear and lance, —
'Christ keep this castle fair
And give it aye good chance.'

IV

They let the bridge adown, the gateway, broad and wide,
Unbar, and open set the door on either side;
The knight, he crossed himself, and passed the castle bound,
Praising the porter good, who, kneeling low on ground,
Gave him Good-day, and prayed that God might save
Gawain —
So doth he wend his way, with one wight in his train,
To lead him to that place of peril stern and grim,
Where he must pay the price, where bale awaiteth him.
By hedgerow winds their way, where boughs are stripped and
bare,
Anon, they climb the cliffs, where cold and chill the air,
The heaven its showers up-held, but here on earth 't was ill,

In mist was merged the moor, mist clung to every hill,
Each ware a cap of cloud, and cloak of mist so dank;
Bubbling, the brooks they brake in foam upon the bank,
Splashed sheer upon the shores, there, where they shelved
adown,
Yea, lone and drear the way, beneath the dark wood's frown
Until the rising sun with gold the hillcrest crown
that tide —
They climbed a hill full high
White snow lay on its side,
The guide, who rode hard by,
Now bade him to abide.

V

'Now lord, as I was pledged, I have ye hither led,
Now are ye nigh the place of note, your quest is sped
That ye have straitly sought, and asked for specially,
But now I know ye well, in sooth, I'ld say to ye —
(Since ye be such a lord that men full well may love,)
Would ye but work my will your welfare it might prove —
The place whereto ye pass right perilous men hold,
A wight doth ward that waste, the worst is he on mould,
For stiff is he, and stern, and over keen to strike,
For height on middle-earth no man hath seen his like;
Bigger of body he, than any four who won
A place in Arthur's house, yea, e'en were Hector one!
And this his custom cursed — here at the Chapel Green

There passeth never man, tho' proud in arms, I ween,
But he doth do to death by dint of deadly blow,
For all discourteous he, nor mercy doth he know.
Chaplain be he, or churl, who by that chapel rides,
Mass priest, or hooded monk, or any man beside,
Is he as fain to slay as he himself to live —
So soothly as ye sit on steed, this rede I give:
Go ye there, with his will, ye come not hence alive —
Trow me, I speak the truth — yea, had ye twenty lives
to spend —
Long time hath he dwelt here,
His conquests know no end,
Against his dints so drear
No shield may ye defend.'

VI

'Wherefore, Sir Gawain good, let ye this man alone,
And for God's sake, I pray, from this place get ye gone.
Ride by some other road, Christ speed ye on your way —
I'll hie me home again, but this I'll do alway,
I'll take an oath by God, and all the saints that be,
Or by such hallows all as shall seem best to ye,
That I will hold my peace, and never tell the tale
That ye to face your foe one time for fear did fail.'
'Gramercy,' quoth Gawain (in sooth ill-pleased was he)
'All good may he receive who wisheth good to me,
That thou would'st silence keep, I well believe of thee,

But, tried be thou, and true, if I should turn me here,
And this thy counsel take, and fly for very fear,
I were a coward knight, excused I might not be,
But at the Chapel Green I'll chance it verily,
With that same man I'll speak, e'en as shall please me well
Be it for weal or woe, as fate the lot may tell —
The knave
May well be stern in fight,
Cunning with sword and stave,
Yet God hath mickle might
His servant true to save!'

VII

'By Mary,' quoth the squire, 'now ye so much have said
That this, your harm, henceforth, to your own count be laid;
Since ye will lose your life I'll hinder not, nor let,
Take ye your spear in hand, on head the helmet set,
And ride adown this road, that by yon rock doth wind,
Till ye the lowest depth of yonder valley find;
A little to the left, on a lawn, shall ye see,
Within that dreary dale, the chapel, verily,
And him, that grisly giant, who shall its keeper be!
Now may God keep ye well, Sir Gawain, noble knight,
For all the gold on earth, I would not, an I might,
In fellowship with ye but one foot further go —'
With that the squire, he turned his horse's head, and so
He spurred him with his heel, and listed not to spare,

But sprang across the lawn, and left the hero there
alone —
'By God,' thus quoth Gawain,
'I'll neither greet nor groan,
To God's will am I fain,
To Him my need is known!'

VIII

He spurreth Gringalet, and down the path doth ride,
Close 'neath a shelving bank, a grove was at his side;
He rides the rough road through, right down into the dale,
Then draweth rein awhile, full wild he deemed that vale;
No sign of dwelling-place he seeth anywhere,
On either side the banks rise steeply, bleak and bare,
And rough and rugged rocks, with many a stony peak,
That shuddering shadows cast — the place was ill to seek.
Gawain, he stayed his steed, and cast his glance around,
And changed full oft his cheer, ere he that chapel found.
Nor here 't was seen, nor there, right strange the chance he
thought;
But soon, upon a lawn, a lawe his eye hath caught,
A smooth hill by a bank, set close beside a burn,
Where by a ford, the flood, forking, aside doth turn,
E'en as they boiled, within, bubbling, the waters spring —
The knight, he turned the rein, his horse to halt doth bring,
At the lawe lights adown, and to a linden bough
The rein, and his good steed, he maketh fast enow.

Then hies him to the hill, and, walking round about,
He cons what it might be, thereof was he in doubt.
A hole was at the end, and one on either side,
And all with grass o'er-grown, in clumps its form that hide,
'T was hollow all within, e'en as a cavern old,
Or crevice of a crag — nor might its use be told
right well —
'Good Lord,' quoth the good knight,
'Be this the Green Chapel?
The devil at midnight
Might here his matins tell!'

IX

'I wis,' so quoth Gawain, 'that wizardry be here,
'T were ill for prayer this place, o'er grown with grasses sere,
'T were fitting, did that wight who wraps himself in green
Do his devotions here in devil's wise, I ween!
By my five wits I feel 't is the foul fiend, in truth,
Who here hath given me tryst, my life he seeks, forsooth!
A chapel of mischance, ill fortune may it win,
'T is the most curséd kirk I e'er set foot within!'
His helmet on his head, his lance gripped fast in hand,
He nighs the rock wherein the dwelling rough doth stand;
Then, from the hill on high, as 't were from out a rock,
On bank beyond the brook, a noise his senses shock;
It clatters thro' the cliffs, as they would cleave in twain,
As one to sharpen scythe on grinding-stone were fain.

Lo! it doth whet and whir as water thro' a mill,
Lo! it doth rush and ring — to hear it was right ill!
Then, 'By God,' quoth Gawain, 'I trow that weapon sheer
They sharpen for that knight who bade me meet him here
this stound
Let God work as He will,
No help elsewhere were found;
Tho' life be forfeit, still
I blench not for a sound.'

X

With that the goodly knight, he called with voice so bold,
'Who waiteth in this place a tryst with me to hold?
For here is Gawain come, here hath he found his way,
If any wight will win aught, let him come to-day,
Or now, or never, so his need be fitly sped —'
A voice spake from the bank, on high, above his head,
'Stay, and I swift will give that which I promised thee —'
Awhile the clamour rang, still rushing rapidly,
The whetstone whirled awhile, ere he his foe might see,
And then, beneath a crag, forth from a cave he sprung,
And, coming from that hole, a weapon round him swung,
A Danish axe, new dight, wherewith the blow to deal,
Bound to the handle fast was the bright blade of steel,
Four foot long, fitly filed, no less, that blade of might,
And all was wrapped and bound with lace that gleamed full
bright;

E'en as before was he in gear of green, that knight —
Green was he face and foot, his hair, his beard's full flow,
But this time on the ground that knight afoot doth go,
Stalking, he held the axe, steel downward, at his side,
Thus to the water wins, and takes it in his stride.
He wades not, with his axe he leaps that water's flow,
And fierce, and bold, bestrides the bent, all white with snow
that day —
Sir Gawain met the knight,
No greeting did he pay,
The other quoth: 'Aright
Hast thou kept tryst to-day!'

XI

'Gawain,' quoth the Green Knight, 'now may God give thee grace,
Welcome art thou, I wis, to this, my dwelling-place;
Thy travel hast thou timed e'en as true man should do —
Thou know'st the forward fast we sware betwixt us two;
This day, a twelve-month past, thy share thereof didst take,
And I, at this New Year, should fitting answer make.
Here in this dale alone, I trow, we be to-day,
To deal as likes us best, with none to say us nay;
Now doff thy helm from head, thy payment forthwith take,
And with no more debate than I with thee did make
When thou whipped off my head, with but one sweeping blow —'

‘Nay, by God,’ quoth Gawain, ‘to whom my life I owe,
Nor greet will I, nor groan, for grief that may befall,
Deal, an thou wilt, the stroke, still will I stand, withal,
Nor bandy words with thee, nor e’er for mercy call —’
Straight there
He bent adown his head,
And shewed his neck all bare,
No sign he gave of dread,
But made as free from care.

XII

Then swift the knight in green made ready for the fray,
And gripped his grim tool fast, as fain Gawain to slay,
With all his body’s force the axe aloft he bare,
A mighty feint he made to deal a death-blow there,
Yea, had he driven adown in wise as he made show
That valiant knight had died beneath the deadly blow.
But as the gisarme fell Gawain, he swerved aside,
E’en as, with fell intent, it did toward him glide;
His shoulders shrank before the sharply gleaming blade,
The other, as he flinched, the axe from falling stayed —
He doth reprove that prince in proud and scornful mood:
‘Thou art not that Gawain whom men aye deem so good,
Who never waxed afraid, by mountain, or by vale,
Now, ere thou feelest hurt, for fear thine heart doth fail —
Such cowardice in such knight I never thought to know —
I never flinched nor fled, when thou didst aim thy blow,

I made no parleying there, within King Arthur's hall,
My head rolled to my feet, I shewed no fear withal;
And thou, ere harm be done, full sore afraid dost seem —
Henceforward, of us twain the braver men shall deem
me aye —'
'I shrank once,' quoth Gawain,
'Henceforth thy stroke I'll stay,
Tho' none may set again
The head that falls to-day!'

XIII

'But haste thee, man, i' faith, thy task to end to bring,
Deal me my destiny, make no more dallying,
For I will stand thy stroke, and start no more, I trow,
Till thine axe hitteth me — my word be gage enow!'
'Have at thee!' quoth the knight, and with his axe made play
With wrathful mien and grim, as mad he were alway.
He struck a mighty blow, yet never wound he dealt,
The axe, his hand withheld, ere Gawain harm had felt.
The knight that stroke abode, nor flinched, that hero free,
But stood still as a stone, or stump of ancient tree
That rooted in the ground with hundred roots hath been —
Right gaily then he quoth, the giant garbed in green,
'So, now thine heart is whole, the stroke I 'll deal this tide,
Thine hood, that Arthur gave, I prithee hold aside,
And keep thy neck thus bent, that naught may o'er it fall —'
Gawain was greatly wroth, and grimly spake withal:

'Why talk on thus, Sir Knight? o'er-long thy threats so bold,
I trow me in thine heart misgivings thou dost hold!'
'Forsooth,' quoth the Green Knight, 'since fierce thy speech alway
I will no longer let thine errand wait its pay
but strike—'
He frowned with lip and brow,
Made feint as he would strike
Who hopes no aid, I trow,
May well such pass mislike.

XIV

Lightly he lifts the axe, and lo! it falleth fair,
The sharp blade somewhat bit into the neck so bare;
But, tho' he swiftly struck, he hurt him no whit more
Save only on that side where thro' the skin it shore;
E'en to the flesh, I trow, it cut, the blade so good,
And o'er his shoulders ran to earth the crimson blood.
Sir Gawain saw his blood gleam red on the white snow
And swift he sprang aside, more than a spear-length's throw;
With speed his helmet good upon his head set fast,
His trusty shield and true, he o'er his shoulders cast,
Drew forth his brand so bright, and fiercely spake alway:
(I trow that in this world he ne'er was half so gay
Since first, from mother's womb he saw the light of day—)
'Now man, withhold thy blow, and proffer me no more,
A stroke here from thy hand without dispute I bore,

Thou gav'st me all thy gain, e'en as good knight and true —
Thus for the morrow's morn another feint was due,
Didst kiss my gentle wife, and kisses gave again —
For these two from mine axe two blows I did but feign
this stead —
To true man payment true,
Of that may none have dread,
Then, didst withhold my due,
Therefore thy blood I shed.'

XVI

"'T is my weed thou dost wear, that self-same lace of green,
'T was woven by my wife, I know it well, I ween,
Thy kisses all I know, thy ways, thy virtues all,
The wooing of my wife, 't was I who willed it all;
I bade her test thy truth — By God who gave me birth
Thou art the truest knight that ever trode this earth!
As one a pearl doth prize, measured 'gainst pease, tho' white,
So do I hold Gawain above all other knight!
Didst thou a little lack, Sir Knight, in loyalty,
'T was not for woman's love, or aught of villainy,
'T was but for love of life, therefore I blame thee less —'
Awhile Sir Gawain stood, silent, for sorriness,
Right sore aggrieved was he, and angered at that same;
Then all his body's blood rushed to his face in flame,
And all for shame he shrank, while yet the Green Knight
spake —

Would'st thou another give, that same I'll here repay,
Give thee as good again, thereto have tryst to-day,
and now —
But one stroke to me falls,
So ran the oath, I trow,
We sware in Arthur's halls,
And therefore guard thee now!'

XV

The Green Knight drew aback, and on his axe did lean,
Setting the shaft to ground, upon the blade so keen,
He looked upon the knight awhile, there, on the land,
Doughty, and void of dread, dauntless doth Gawain stand,
All armed for strife — at heart it pleased him mightily,
Then, with voice loud and clear he speaketh merrily,
Hailing aloud the knight, gaily to him doth say:
'Bold Sir, upon this bent be not so stern to-day,
For none, discourteous, here methinks mishandled thee,
Nor will, save e'en as framed at court in forward free;
I promised thee a stroke, thou hast it at this same,
With that be thou content, I make no further claim.
An such had been my will, a buffet, verily,
Rougher I might have dealt, and so done worse to thee,
Firstly, I menace made with but a feignéd blow,
And harmed thee ne'er a whit; that, I would have thee know,
Was for the forward fast we made in that first night
When thou didst swear me troth, and kept that troth aright,

Then in this fashion first lament the knight did make;
'Covetousness, accurst be thou, and cowardice,
In virtue's stead ye bring both villainy and vice —'
With that he caught the knot, and loosed the lace so bright,
Giveth the girdle green again to the Green Knight,
'Lo! there the false thing take, a foul fate it befall,
Fear of thy blow, it taught me cowardice withal,
With custom covetous to league me, and thus wrong
Largesse and loyalty, which do to knights belong.
Faulty am I, and false, to fear hath been a prey,
From treachery and untruth is sorrow born alway,
and care —
So here I own to thee
That faithless did I fare;
Take thou thy will of me,
Henceforth I'll be more 'ware!'

XVII

The Green Knight laughed aloud, and spake right merrily,
'Whole am I of the hurt that thou didst deal to me;
Thy misdeeds hast thou shewn, and hast confessed thee clean,
Hast borne the penance sharp of this, mine axe-edge keen,
I hold thee here absolved, and purged as clean this morn
As thou hadst ne'er done wrong since the day thou wert born.
This girdle, hemmed with gold, Sir Knight, I give to thee,
'T is green as this my robe, as thou right well may'st see,
Look thou thereon, Gawain, whenas thou forth dost fare,

Mid many a prince of price, and this for token bear
Of chance midst chivalrous knights, that thou didst here
abide —
And thou, in this New Year with me shalt homeward ride,
With me in revel spend the remnant of this tide
I ween —'
The lord, he held him fast,
Quoth: 'Tho' my wife hath been
Your foe, that is well past,
Peace be ye twain between!'

XVIII

'Nay, forsooth,' quoth Gawain, he seizèd his helm full fain,
And set it on his head, and thanked his host again;
'Sad was my sojourning, yet bliss be yours alway,
May He, who ruleth all, right swiftly ye repay.
To her, your comely wife, commend me courteously,
Yea, and that other dame, honoured they both may be
Who thus their knight with craft right skilful did beguile —
And yet small marvel 't is if one, thro' woman's wile
Befooled shall be oft-times, and brought to sorrow sore,
For so was he betrayed, Adam, our sire, of yore,
And Solomon full oft! Delilah swift did bring
Samson unto his fate; and David too, the king,
By Bathsheba ensnared, grief to his lot must fall —
Since women these beguiled 't were profit great withal
An one might love them well, and yet believe them not!

For of all men on earth had these the fairest lot,
All other they excelled 'neath Heaven — if they, God wot,
be mused,
Yielding themselves to wile
Of women, whom they used,
Then, an one me beguile,
I hold me well excused.'

XIX

'But for your girdle, good, may God the gift repay,
I take it of good will; not for its gold alway,
For samite, nor for silk, nor for its pendants fair,
For worship, nor for weal, will I that token wear;
In sign of this, my sin, the silk I still shall see,
And, riding in renown, reproach me bitterly,
Of this my fault, how flesh is all too frail, and fain
To yield when sore enticed, and gather to it stain.
Thus, when for prowess fair in arms I yield to pride,
I'll look upon this lace, and so more humbly ride.
But one thing would I pray, an so it please ye well,
Lord are ye of this land, where I awhile did dwell
With ye in worship fair — (For this, reward be told
From Him who sits on high, and doth the world uphold —)
But tell me now your name, no more from ye I crave —'
'That truly will I tell,' so spake that baron brave:
'Bernlak de Hautdesert, so men me rightly call —
'T is she, Morgain la Faye, who dwelleth in mine hall,

(Who knoweth many a craft, well versed in cunning wile,
Mistress of Merlin erst,) doth many a man beguile,
(And many a druerie dear she dealt with that same wight,
Who was a skilful clerk, and well he knew each knight
of fame —)
Morgain, the goddess, she,
So men that lady name,
And none so proud shall be
But she his pride can tame!'

XX

'She sent me in this guise unto King Arthur's hall
To test your knightly pride, if it were sooth, withal,
The fair renown that runs, of this, your Table Round,
'T was she taught me the craft which ye so strange have
found,
To grieve Gaynore, the queen, and her to death to fright
Thro' fear of that same man who spake, a ghastly sight,
Before the table high, with severed head in hand —
'T is she, that ancient dame ye saw in this my land,
And she is e'en thine aunt, sister to Arthur true,
Born of Tintagel's dame, whom later Uther knew,
And gat with her a son, Arthur, our noble king,
Therefore unto thine aunt I would thee straightway bring,
Make merry in mine house, my men are to thee fain,
And I wish thee as well, here on my faith, Gawain,
As any man on earth, for true art thou, and tried —'

But yet he said him 'nay' with him he would not ride.
They clasp, and kiss again — the other, each commends
Unto the Prince of Peace, and there they part as friends
on mould —
To the king's hall, I ween,
Sir Gawain rideth bold,
He gat, that knight in green,
Where'er he would on wold.

XXI

The wild ways of the world Sir Gawain now must trace
A-horse, of this his life, he now hath gotten grace;
He harbours oft in house, and oft, I ween, without,
Oft venture bold, in vale, vanquished in battle stout,
Such as, at this same time, I care not to recall —
Whole was the hurt he won upon his neck withal,
And the bright belt of green he ware about him wound,
Even in baldric's wise, fast at his side 't was bound;
'Neath his left arm the lace was fastened in a knot,
This token of his fault he bare with him, I wot.
So cometh he to court, all hale, the knight so true,
Weal wakened in those halls whenas the dwellers knew
That good Gawain had come — Methinks they deemed it gain,
To greet that knight with kiss the king and queen were fain,
And many a valiant knight would kiss and clasp him there —
Eager, they tidings ask, How did his venture fare?

And he doth truly tell of all his toil and care;
Of the Green Chapel's chance, the fashion of the knight,
The lady's proffered love, last, of the lace aright
He tells, and on his neck he shews them, as a brand,
The cut that, for his fault, he won from that knight's hand
in blame —
Grieving, he spake alway,
And groaned for very shame,
The red blood rose, that day,
E'en to his face, like flame.

XXII

'Lo! lord,' so spake the knight, handling the lace so fair,
'See here the brand of blame that on my neck I bear,
Lo! here the harm and loss I to myself have wrought,
The cowardice covetous in which I there was caught,
This token of untruth, wherein I was held fast;
And I this needs must wear long as my life shall last.
For none may hide his harm, nor may that be undone,
Once caught within a snare the net is ne'er unspun!'
The king, he cheered the knight, the courtiers, with their lord,
Laughed loudly at the tale, and sware with one accord,
That lords and ladies all, of this, the Table Round,
Each of the Brotherhood, should bear, as baldric bound,
About his waist, a band, a badge of green so bright,
This would they fitly wear in honour of that knight.
With one accord they sware, those knights so good and true,

And he who bare that badge the greater honour knew.
The best book of Romance, in that 't is written all,
How in King Arthur's days this venture did befall,
The Brutus books thereof, I trow, shall witness bear —
And since Brutus the bold at first did hither fare,
Whose fathers the assault and siege of Troy did share,
I wis,
Many have been of yore
The ventures such as this,
Christ, who a thorn-crown bore,
Bring us unto His bliss! Amen.

The Adventures of Arthur at the Tarn Wadeling

The Adventures of Arthur at the Tarn Wadeling

Of the days of King Arthur this marvel is told,
By Tarn Wadeling's water — the book so doth tell —
To Carlisle had he come then, that conqueror bold,
With dukes, and with douzepeers, who gladly there dwell.
The herd would they hunt, that remote had their hold,
Till one day they did dight them to ride through the dell —
To harry the hinds, hidden deep in the wold,
In the close-time, they gat them o'er frith and o'er fell.
They went to the woodland in fair knightly weed,
And rode, King and Queen,
With knights doughty, I ween,
Good Sir Gawain in green,
Queen Gaynore doth lead.

Then Sir Gawain the good Dame Gaynore doth lead
In glittering raiment, gleaming so gay,
And laced all with ribbons, (who rightly doth read)
That decked it all over in richest array.
A fair hood of azure she weareth indeed,
With purple, and pall-work, and pearls for her pay,
A short cloak doth shroud her 'gainst rain, if she need,
Set over with sapphires — (who soothly will say.) —
Sapphire, chalcedony, wrought on each side,

And her saddle that ilk,
With rich trappings of silk;
On a mule white as milk
She gaily doth ride.

Thus Dame Gaynore, the good, most gaily that tide
Fared forth with Sir Gawain, beside a fair well,
On a courser the knight full comely him hied,
Bred was it in Burgundy, I have heard tell,
So long he led Gaynore, that fair loch beside,
By a laurel she lighteth low down, near the fell, —
The King with his nobles doth steadily ride,
Their tryst would he shew them, there in a green dell. —
Their tryst hath he shewn them, that truly I trow,
Each lord without let,
'Neath a tree is he set,
With bow and brachet
'Neath the green woodland bough.

Thus they bide 'neath the boughs, those barons so bold,
Barren hinds do they wait for, by banks bleak and bare;
The nobles on high, the herds they behold,
The horns do they hearken, thro' holts ringing fair.
Their hounds they uncouple, beneath cliffs so cold,
Caress them, and comfort, to cure them of care.
They fall on the hinds then, in fell force enfold,
With hounds fierce and fresh do they, following, fare.

Thus they quest and they quell,
By frith and by fell,
Till the deer in the dell
They scatter and scare.

In the dusk of the groves the deer fain would hide;
For terror of death, droops and trembles the doe —
To the wild water sweeping, in swift swirling tide,
There war on the wild swine, it worketh them woe.
The hunters, they halloo thro' wood, and hillside,
They stir up the brachets to follow the roe,
No rest, and no respite they grant at that tide,
The hounds thro' the green groves, so gladly they go.
So gladly they go, 'neath the fair greenwood tree —
The King blows a rechase;
Fast follows the race,
With serjeants of mace,
The sport fain to see.

Thus, that solace to see, knights fairest withal
Their sovereign sought, 'neath the shadow and sheen,
All saving Sir Gawain, the gayest of all,
Who is left with Dame Gaynore, beneath the groves green.
By a laurel she lay, in a fair leafy hall,
Of box and of barberry well built, I ween,
There did, at the noontide, this venture befall,
And this mickle marvel, I trow me, was seen.

This marvel I fain now would tell, an I might,
The day waxed as drear
As tho' midnight drew near,
King Arthur, in fear,
From his steed doth alight.

To find them on foot those knights scarce were fain,
They fled to the forest by fen and by fell,
They ran to their brachets, for ruth of the rain,
And snow, sharply smiting, that drifts thro' the dell.
Then there came from the loch, in a form I'll make plain,
In Lucifer's likeness, one fashioned in hell,
Thus, gliding to Gaynore its way hath it ta'en,
Lamenting so loudly, with shriek and with yell.
With moaning and mourning, the tears fast they fleet —
Then it saith, sighing sair,
'Woe to her who me bare,
I be come to such care
That I grieve and I greet!'

Then, full sorely greeting, Dame Gaynore, the gay,
She calls on Sir Gawain: 'What now is thy rede?'
''T is but an eclipse, so I heard a clerk say.'
Thus, knightly, he comforts the queen in her need.
'Sir Cador, Sir Constantine, Sir Cleges, Sir Kay,'
She cries, 'knights uncourteous, by cross and by creed,
Thus lonely to leave me, at this, my death-day,

With the grisliest ghost that from grave e'er was freed!'
'For the ghost,' quoth the hero, 'now have no more care,
For that spirit I'll hail,
And will hearken its tale,
May I better the bale
Of the body so bare.'

All bare was the body, black was the bone,
Enwrapped in a clout, for clothing ill clad,
It mourned and lamented as women make moan,
Of skin, nor of colour, no covering it had.
It stayed itself, standing, as still as a stone,
It groaned, and it glared, and it made as one mad —
To that ghost, grim and grisly, Sir Gawain hath gone,
And nigheth it swiftly, nor fear thereof had —
Afraid was he never, — who readeth aright —
On her cheek bare and dry
A toad might ye spy,
All hollow her eye,
As embers glow bright,

As embers red glowing; the ghost, as it glides,
Was wrapt in a clout, in ill clothing and drear,
Set over with serpents that clung to its sides,
To tell of the toads were a tale full of fear.
He drew forth his brand, and the phantom he bides,
The hero, so chivalrous, changeth not cheer;

The hounds seek the holts, their heads fain to hide,
With greyhounds, aghast at the grim sounds they hear.
Aghast are the hounds as the grim ghost draws near —
The birds in the tree,
When the phantom they see,
They shriek piercingly,
The men might them hear.

The men might them hear, the fairest in hall,
(Her jaw how it chattered, from cheek to the chin),
The knight he conjures it, in Christ's name doth call:
'By the King on the cross, the Cleanser of sin,
Say now, thou weird wight, whither goest withal?
And wherefore dost wander these wild woods within?'
She spake: 'Once in flesh clad, the fairest of all,
Christened, and chrisomed, with kings in my kin,
I had kings for my kin, who were good knights, and keen —
God hath set, in His grace,
For my penance, this place,
And I come in this case
To speak with the queen.'

'For queen was I, somewhile, and brighter of brow
Than beryl, on Brangwain, maiden so bold,
Of game, and of gladness, on this earth, I trow,
More had I than Gaynore, by great sums of gold.
Of park and of pales, of pond and of plough,

Of towers, and towns, and of treasures untold,
Of castles, of countries, of cliffs, yea, enow,
From kith am I cast forth to care grim and cold —
Cold care is my portion, my couch is but clay —
Lo! see, courteous knight,
Death to dole hath me dight;
I would fain have a sight
Of Gaynore, the gay!'

Then Sir Gawain, the good, to Gaynore hath gone,
To that body hath brought her — and the bride bright,
She quoth: 'Welcome Waynore, who worship dost own,
Behold how thy mother is dolefully dight!
For my cheek, it was redder than rose fully blown,
My face, it was fairer than lily so white,
Grim ghost am I now, and right grisly my groan,
Laid low in a loch, in Lucifer's might —
Thus low am I laid, take ye witness of me —
For tho' fair ye appear
In your mirror so clear,
King, Duke, and Kaisere,
All thus shall ye be!

Thus Death will ye dight, of that have no doubt,
So hearken and heed thee while yet thou art fair,
When, richly arrayed, thou dost ride forth in rout
Then pity the poor, for his sorrows have care,

Ere men and ere maidens shall come thee about
And thy body, embalméd, on bier forth shall fare,
They will leave thee full lightly, that now lowly lout,
And nothing may aid thee but penance and prayer.
For the prayer of the poor it may purchase thee peace —
Give the poor at thy gate
When thou sittest in state,
With mirth for thy mate,
And dainties on daïs. —

With dainties on daïs thy dishes are dight,
And in dungeon and dole is my fortune so fell,
Naked and needy, and nauseous to sight,
The place it is loathsome wherein I must dwell.
They handle me hardly, they heave me on height,
In brass and in brimstone I 'm molten as bell,
I wot not in this world so woeful a wight,
'T were hard for a tongue all my torments to tell.
Yet I'ld tell of these torments ere hence I must go —
Think thou truly on this,
Mend what now is amiss,
I have warned thee, I wis,
Be thou ware of my woe!'

'Woe is me for thy weird,' quoth Gaynore, 'I wis,
One thing would I know, an so thy will were,
Might matins, or mass, mend what now is amiss

Or wealth of this world, that to me were right fair!
If bede of these bishops might bring thee to bliss,
Or cloister, by covenant, cure thee of care —
Since my mother thou art, I much marvel at this
That thus thy fair body be waxen so bare?'
She quoth, 'My womb bare thee, what boots to deny?
And this token may'st trow,
That I once brake a vow
As I only, and thou
Knew, thus truth may ye try!'

Quoth Gaynore: 'Now say, what from dole may thee light?
Holy men from the city I 'll seek for thy sake,
For those beasts, all so baleful, thy body that bite,
And thy blood turned to blackness, mine eyes blind they make!'
'Nay, these were my lovers, erst-while my delight,
But now have they brought me thus low, in this lake,
All the wealth of this world, it hath now taken flight,
While these worms, so wretched, my torment they make.
Thus to wrath am I wrought, but, sweet Waynore, I wis,
Masses nine hundred, done
'Twixt undern and noon
My soul had, right soon,
Brought, succoured, to bliss.'

'To bliss may He bring thee, who bought us with blood,
Who reigned from the cross, all crownéd with thorn,
(Wast christened, and chrisomed, with candle so good,
And bathed in a fair font, tho' now art forlorn.)
And Mary, His Mother, who mild is of mood,
Of whom that Blest Bairn was in Bethlehem born,
Give me grace, that thy soul I may greet with the good —
I will mind thee with matins, and mass, come the morn!'
'To mind me with masses I trow, were great need!
For Christ's sake, on rood,
Prithee deal of thy good
To those who lack food
Whilst thou life here dost lead.'

'Here I proffer my hand, thy behest will I hold,
With a million of masses thy peace will I win;
But one thing,' quoth Waynore, 'I fain would be told
What angers Christ most? Say, canst tell me the sin?'
'Yea, Pride, with his panoply; prophets of old
They preached to the people right truly herein,
It bears branches full bitter, thereof be thou bold,
For many good knights, they break God's law herein —
Who breaketh God's bidding, bare is he of bliss —
Save thou salve that sore fair
Certes, ere thou hence fare
Thou shalt find mickle care
Fair Waynore, I wis!'

'Now tell me,' quoth Waynore, 'if so be thou may,
What bede best may boot us, to endless bliss bring?'
'Now, Measure, and Meekness, they come first alway,
To pity the poor man, that pleasures Our King!
'T is Charity leadeth the pure on their way,
And almsgiving profits o'er all other thing,
Of the Holy Ghost, gracious and good gifts be they
Who inspireth each spirit, and wasteth no thing.
But now of this spirit no more will I say —
Whiles in gladness thou art
Hold these words in thy heart,
Here but fleeting thy part
And from hence must away!'

'How fare we,' quoth Gawain, 'who go forth to fight,
And vanquish these folk in full many a land?
Rich realms, we o'er-run them, in sooth, against right,
Winning worship and wealth thro' the strength of our hand.'
'Too greedy your King, and too keen be his knights,
And no strength may stir him the while his luck stand,
But yet in his majesty, when most in might,
Full low shall he lie, beside the sea-sand.
Thus your chivalrous King shall suffer mischance —
So goes Fortune in fight,
The wondrous wheel-wright,
Makes that depth which was height,
Now take witness by France —'

'For France, in a fair fight, and freely, ye won,
And Frollo and Farnet, the twain ye left dead,
Bretagne and Burgundy, both be undone,
And all the Douzeperes of your dints be in dread.
Now Jean he may greet that that war was begun,
No folk, on that land they may live, in this stead,
Yet the rich realm of Rome shall by you be o'errun,
And at the Round Table the rental be read —
Yet loss is its lot, at the last as I ween.
Get thee forth, good Gawain,
Turn thy face to Tuscane,
Or thou losest Bretagne,
Thro' a bold knight and keen.'

'A knight, he shall keenly lay claim to the crown
At Carlisle, I trow, men shall crown him as king,
Therewith shall invest him, in session laid down,
And sorrow and bale he to Britain shall bring.
Ye shall hear this in Tuscany, where ye be bound,
And turn, when the tiding of treason they bring,
There shall the Round Table be robbed of renown
When Ramsay the rich with the conflict shall ring.
And at Dorset shall die knights, the bravest of all —
Get thee forth, good Gawain,
Bravest thou in Bretagne,
On the shore shalt be slain,
Marvels strange shall befall!'

'Such marvels shall chance, with never a fable,
On Cornwall, its coasts, betwixt knights so keen,
There Arthur, the comely, the steadfast, and stable,
Full sore shall be wounded, to death, as I ween.
An all that rout royal, the noble Round Table,
Shall die on that day, when brave deeds are seen,
Thus, tricked by a traitor, with shield all of sable,
With sauter for badge, in silver so sheen;
His shield is of sable, who soothly will say —
Yea, in King Arthur's hall
Does that child play at ball
Who betrayeth ye all
Right dearly, one day.'

She quoth, 'Good-day, Gawain, and Gaynore the good,
No longer I linger here, tidings to tell,
But I walk on my way, throughout yonder wood,
Alas, where I bide now is woeful to dwell.
For His sake who, righteous, once hung on the rood,
Think now on the dole where, in doom, I must dwell,
And succour my soul with some measure of good,
And mind me with masses, and bedes for me tell —
For masses amend us, who in bale abide, —
And to us they be sweet
As the spice which ye eat —'
The ghost grisly doth greet,
As away she doth glide.

With greeting thus grisly the ghost away glides,
With groaning so grim it were gruesome to hear,
The wind and the welkin, the weather, that tide,
Abate. Lo! the clouds part, the sun waxeth clear.
The King blew his bugle on bent where he bides,
The fair folk on field they flock to him near,
And all the rout royal towards the Queen rides
And welcome her gladly, with courteous cheer.
The knights, at the weather they wonder alway —
Princes, proudest in pall,
With Queen Gaynore, they all
To Rondall-seat Hall,
For meat go, straightway.

When the King, he was set, and served, in his hall,
With silk o'er his head, and dainties well dight.
With wealth at his will, and choice wines withal,
With birds baked in bread, on gold burnished bright,
Lo! one with a citole, whose notes softly fall,
Then a lady so lovesome, leading a knight,
She rides to the daïs, and there, 'fore them all,
She haileth King Arthur, who sits on its height;
And saith to the sovereign, fairest in weed —
'Now, man matchless in might,
Here an heir, and a knight,
Do him reason and right,
For thine honour take heed!'

In his mantle enfolded he sat at his meat,
His pall as a peacock was proudly bedight,
Besprinkled with true-loves, in fair knots, and meet,
The tassels of topaz, gay gleaming, and bright.
With eyes great and grey, he looked up, swift to greet,
With beard beaver-hued, so beheld he that knight,
The seemliest lord that e'er sat on high seat
Whom suppliant sought, or beheld e'er with sight.
Thus the King, fair and comely, he spake soft and still —
And saith: 'Lady, alight,
And abide here all night,
Whence this heir and this knight?
What now is thy will?'

'T was the loveliest lady seen upon mold,
In glorious raiment garbed, all of grass-green,
All white was her girdle, with birds broidered bold,
Adornéd with besants, and buckle of sheen.
Her hair with fine pearls was entwinéd, and rolled,
With fillet and caul wrought of colour so clean,
Her coronet, comely, was bright to behold,
Her kerchiefs were rare, and pins precious, I ween.
Her apparel was praised by princes of might —
And bright dames behold
With pleasure untold
The charms manifold
Of that maid and her knight.

That knight in his harness was well armed, I ween,
His crest, it was comely, and bright to behold,
In hauberk and helmet accoutred, so keen —
(The helmet was bordered with bright burnished gold)
And milk-white his mail, that well tested hath been,
And his horse's fair trappings, so true men have told,
With a shield on his shoulder of silver so sheen,
With boar's heads of sable — his glance keen and bold,
And cendal of Tars swept to his steed's heel —
On the chamfron is borne,
(E'en as 't were unicorn —)
Keen, and sharp as a thorn,
A spike all of steel.

In steel was he closéd, that knight stern on steed,
With stars wrought of gold besprinkled alway,
His gloves and his doublet, they gleam red indeed,
Adornéd with ribbons in richest array.
The leg-bands are shining, to shelter from need,
The knee-plates with peridots powdered so gay,
Thus, lance raised aloft, he the lady doth lead,
His squire, on a Friesland foal follows, i-fay.
The foal was afraid, and feared for the fare —
He was ne'er wont to see
Such fair tapestrie,
Such game and such glee,
I trow, he saw ne'er!

Then the King called upon him, in hearing of all,
'Whence art thou bold baron? What now is thy will?
Say, whence art thou come, whither goest withal?
Why check thou thy steed? Why dost thou stand still?'
Then he lifted his vizor before them in hall,
With countenance knightly, he spake of good will:
'Be thou Kaiser, or King, here on thee do I call
To find me a foeman to fight me my fill.
Since to fight I am fain, and thus fare at this same —'
The King spake forthright,
'Now abide here all night,
An thou be courteous knight,
And tell me thy name!'

'Sir Galeron, I,' so he quoth, 'without guile,
In Galloway greatest, by river and rill,
Of Carrick, and Cumnake, Coninghame, Kyle,
Lonwick, and Lennox, of Lauder's fair hill.
All these hast thou won thee, in war, by thy wile,
And given to Gawain, that liketh me ill,
Yet shalt thou thy hands wring, bemoan thee by whiles,
Ere any bear rule there against my good will —
Against my good will the rule no man shall wield
The while I be here,
Save with shield and sharp spear,
He shall win it right dear
Upon a fair field!'

'In fair field would I fight, and thereto I make claim,
With such knight upon land as shall be nobly born,
To lose such a lordship I hold it for shame,
For every fair lady would laugh me to scorn.'
'In our woodland we be,' quoth the King, 'at our game.
The herd are we hunting with hound and with horn,
If good knight, and gladsome, count now on our name:
We'll match thee together the morrow's mid-morn.
Thus brave man, I rede thee, abide here this night!' —
Gawain, gayest of all,
Led him forth from the hall,
To a tent, which of pall
Was right richly bedight.

So richly bedight 't was with purple and pall,
With beds all o'er covered with broideries bright,
Therein was a chapel, a chamber, a hall,
A chimney of charcoal, to warm well the knight.
They take his good steed, and they lead it to stall,
Of hay had they filled up the rack to the height,
They set up a board, and for coverings they call,
With salt and with napkin they serve swift that knight.
With torches, and tapers, and standards between —
They serve that good knight,
And the lady so bright,
With dainties fair dight
Upon silver so sheen.

Thus in silver so shining they serve at behest
Both the white wine, and red, in cups fair and clean,
With sweet drinks, and luscious, and meats of the best,
Rich dainties in dishes fair gilded, I ween.
Then, e'en as that hero was led to his rest,
The King called his councillors, brave knights, and keen,
And quoth, 'Look ye, lordings, who meeteth this quest?
Who shall cope with this knight, that our prowess be seen?'
Then answered Sir Gawain, 'For naught shall we grieve,
I will meet with this knight
To maintain mine own right,
So my troth will I plight,
My lord, with your leave!'

'I trow me,' quoth Arthur, 'thou takest it light,
Yet small were my joy, if of life thou wert 'lorn!'
'Let be,' quoth Sir Gawain, 'God stand by the right,
For, an he 'scape scatheless, I 'ld hold it for scorn.'
In the dawning of day, they, doughty, were dight,
Heard matins and mass, so meekly, at morn,
In mid Plumtun Lone their pavilions were pight,
Where ne'er before heroes had fought on the lawn.
The lists, they have set them the length of the land —
They bring wine so red
With three sops of bread
To Gawain, at this stead,
So the King gave command.

The King, he hath bidden the good Earl of Kent
That he, courteous, care for the challenging knight,
And make him on dainties to dine in his tent,
With that, they array that prince royal, as right.
Then straight to Queen Waynore with wisdom they went,
In her ward would they leave her, that lady so bright,
The heroes, a-horse, for the field are they bent,
In the lists on the lawn, those lords they alight —
Save the stiffest on steed, in their stirrups they stood —
They place the King's seat
On the daïs, as is meet,
The Queen, she must greet
For Gawain the good.

Then Gawain and Galeron spurs each his steed,
With glittering gold all gay is their gear,
The lords to the lists swift the champions lead,
With serjants of mace, as doth fitly appear.
The knights prick their chargers, until their sides bleed,
Each hero on field, he hath gripped fast his spear,
They shiver and splinter each shaft on the shield,
So justly they jousted, those knights without peer.
They shiver their shafts in the shields fair and sheen —
And then with brands bright
On the rich mails they smite,
So jousted the knight
With Gawain on the green.

Sir Gawain, the good, he was garbed all in green,
With gryphons of gold, engravéd so gay,
All studded with love-knots, and tassels between,
On a steed of high spirit he starts on his way.
He takes him in turning, his foeman so keen,
Saying, 'Whither so wildly? Thou ridest astray!'
In his neck doth he smite him, with sword sharp and sheen,
That grievéd Sir Gawain until his death-day!
The dints of that doughty knight doleful have been —
Thro' mails sixty and more
That sword sharply shore,
Thro' the collar-bone bore
And cleft the shield clean.

He cleaveth the cantel that covers the knight,
Thro' shield and thro' shoulder a half-foot he share,
Then discourteous, he loudly doth laugh at that sight,
But Gawain, he groaned, and he grieved sorely there.
'This joust I 'll repay thee, an I read aright —'
He dashed at the knight on a course fresh and fair,
Thro' basnet and burnie that burnished were bright,
With brand sharply biting, he thro' the twain bare.
He bare thro' the burnie, all burnished so bright —
He groaned, that knight gay,
'T was no jesting, i-fay,
His steed starts astray
The stirrups drawn tight.

With stirrup drawn straight, a stern blow doth he smite
Aimed full at Sir Gawain, as one mad of mood,
His true love, she shrieked, as she sat on the height,
That maid, she was mournful to see the red blood.
But the lords and the ladies were fain for that sight,
Thank God for the grace shown to Gawain the good —
With a blow of his brand that doth bitterly bite
He smites from Gawain's steed the head, as it stood —
That fair foal, it faltered, and fell, by the rood,
But Gawain, swift and smart,
From his stirrups did start
As one valiant of heart,
From Grisell the good.

'Grisell,' quoth Gawain, 'is gone, so God wot,
The goodliest steed that ever bit bread,
By Him who in Beth'lem was born for our boot,
I'll avenge him to-day, if I rightly have read!'
'Now take thee my Frison, the fairest afoot,
Methinks he shall stand thee right well at this stead —'
'Thy Frison, I prize it but at a rush-root,
For dole of a dumb beast so dolefully sped —
I no Mantichore mourn, I may yet get me more —'
As he stood by his steed
Which was good in each need,
He was nigh mad indeed —
Sir Gawain wept sore.

Sore weeping for woe, Sir Gawain, the knight,
He ran on his foeman, who wounded was sore,
The other drew backward, for dread of his might,
Then spurred fast his steed on the bent bare and hoar.
'So spend we the day,' quoth Gawain, 'to the night,
The sun, it hath passed now the noontide, and more.'
Mid the lists on the lawn, the lord did alight;
'Gainst the foe with his brand, right bravely he bore.
They to battle betake them with brands gleaming bright,
The shields splinters shed,
Their rich mails wax red,
Many brave men have dread,
So fiercely they fight.

Thus afoot do they fight, upon the fair field,
As fresh as two lions, that lack of their fill,
So, wise in their ways, their weapons they wield,
Wot ye well, that Sir Gawain, he lacked not for skill!
Bearing onward, his brand, beneath the broad shield
Thro' the midst of his body, his foe he smites ill,
The sword stayed for no mail, tho' well he was steeled,
The other starts backward, and standeth full still.
Yet, tho' he be stonied, his strokes they fall fair —
He strikes at Gawain
Thro' his vizor again
That he 'scapes to be slain
By the breadth of a hair.

With swords raised aloft on the helmets they hew,
They beat down the beryls from circlets so bright,
(Which men with gems royal besprinkle and strew) —
With fretwork of fine gold, that fails in the fight.
Their shields on their shoulders were dulled in their hue,
Strong fastenings of steel, they be cloven with might,
Then men curse the hour that such bargain they drew,
That e'er dints so doleful were dealt to such knights.
It vexed Arthur at heart, full sad waxed his mood —
Sir Lot and Sir Lake,
Mickle mourning they make,
Gaynore grieved for the sake
Of Sir Gawain the good.

She greeteth, Dame Gaynore, with tears from grey een,
For grief of Sir Gawain, who grim wounds hath found,
The knight who was courteous, cruel, and keen,
With a sharp sword of steel he strikes in that stound.
The side of his foeman he carveth down clean,
All thro' the rich mails that were well wrought and round,
Such a stroke in that tide he taught him, I ween,
That he smiteth Sir Galeron, grovelling, to ground.
Thus, grovelling on ground, he doth groan on the green —
Tho' sore wounded he,
Rose again, speedily,
And his foeman doth he
Attack with sword keen.

Thus cruel, and keen, he strikes from on height,
With a cast from the left doth a cantel inlay;
(There woeful, but willing waits Gawain, the wight),
Yet befell him the worse, as doth please me alway!
He deemed thro' a feigning to slay him with sleight, —
The sword it slipped slant-wise, sliding astray,
Then Gawain, by the collar, he clutches the knight,
His lady, aloft, she doth shriek in dismay,
And crieth on Gaynore in tones sharp and shrill —
'Queen, peerless in might,
Now, pity yon knight,
Who is dolefully dight,
An it were but thy will!'

Then Waynore, the wilful, to Arthur she went;
Her crown she cast off, and she knelt low and still,
Saying: 'As thou be richest, most royal in rent,
And I be thy wedded wife, here, at thy will,
Yon knights who do battle before us, on bent,
Are weary, I wis, and be wounded right ill,
Cut thro' shield and through shoulder, they're shamefully spent,
The groans of Sir Gawain with grief my heart fill;
Sir Gawain the good, his groans grieve me sore —
Would ye, dear my lord,
Set these knights at accord,
'T would comfort afford
To us ye before.'

Sir Galeron spake then to Gawain the good,
'I deemed never yet there had been such a knight,
Now here I release thee of rent, by the rood,
Before this rout royal I yield thee my right.
And here do thee homage, in mildness of mood,
As man who on mid-earth the most is of might!'
He strode to the King in that place where he stood,
And proffered his brand, that was burnished and bright,
Saying: 'Rental, and riches, of these take release —'
Down kneeléd he there,
Spake those words fast and fair —
Then the King doth declare
And command, there be peace.

The King ordered peace, and with that stood upright,
Then Gawain, the goodly, he ceased for his sake,
With that, lords so loyal, they leapt up full light,
Yvain, Fitz Urien; Sir Erec, Fitz-Lake;
Sir Meliadus, Sir Marrok, mickle of might,
Those twain, sorely travailed, so truly they take;
Those stern men, they scarcely may hold them upright,
For bruises, and blood-letting, black hues they take.
Right black be their hues, thus battered with brands —
Nor demand they delay
But their forward, that day,
'Fore King Arthur, straightway,
They swear with raised hand.

'Now I give:' quoth the King, 'to thee, Gawain, the bold,
Glamorgan's fair land, with groves all of green,
The worship of Wales, in field, and in wold,
The castle of Kirfré, coloured so clean.
And Hulkersholm take thou, to have and to hold,
With Weyford, and Waterford, walled towns, I ween,
In Britain two baronies, with burgs so bold,
That right well embattled, and builded have been.
And here "Duke" I name thee, and dub thee with hand —
Make peace with yon knight,
Who is valiant in fight,
Resign him thy right,
And yield him his land.'

'Now I give thee,' quoth Gawain, 'without any guile,
That which thou of chivalry challenged me fair,
The Lother, the Lemmok, the Loynak, the Lile,
Yea, forsooth, all the country 'twixt Logher and Layre.
With Carrick, and Cumnake, Conynghame, Kyle,
To hold for thyself, and the same to thine heir,
And pray of our company be thou awhile,
And to the Round Table we'ld have thee repair.
And here I invest thee in feoff at this tide —'
The King and the Queen,
With their good knights, I ween,
Thro' wood-ways so green,
To Carlisle they ride.

To Carlisle hath the King come, with brave knights and keen,
Thro' green groves, the Round Table, with royal array,
Hath he held, and the heroes, sore wounded I ween,
The leeches have healed, an the sooth ye would say.
They cared for them kindly, the King and the Queen,
And dukes did they dub them the twain on one day —
Then he wedded his lady, so gracious, and sheen,
With gifts, and with treasure, Sir Galeron gay.
Gawain, Galeron, they be good friends alway —
        When he waxed whole and sound
        Of the good Table Round,
        Galeron, at that stound,
        Did they make knight, straightway.

Then Waynore the Queen, bade write to the West,
And bade all religious to read, and to sing,
The priests, the provincials, to pray were they prest,
A million of masses, her mother's minding.
Then book-learnéd clerks, and of bishops the best,
Thro' Britain so bold, they bade the bells ring —
In Inglewood Forest, this marvel confest
Befell, 'neath holts hoar, when he hunted, the King.
Of such hunting, I trow, men often shall tell —
        Thus knights, true, and tried,
        Thro' the forest they ride,
        With King Arthur, that tide
        That this venture befell.

Morte Arthure

Morte Arthure

ARTHUR'S DREAM

Royal, the King rehearsed these words anon:
'Make revel, and rejoice, for Rome is won!
At ease make hostages of nobles high,
Those of mine host, entreat them fittingly,
Emperor of Almayne, and the Eastern bound,
Overlord I, of all on earth that's found!
By Holy-Cross-tide we'll o'er these lands holds sway
At Rome be crownéd King on Christmas Day!
My vassals calling, Table Round I'll hold,
The rents of Rome be at my bidding told —
Gathering my men, I'll get me o'er the sea,
To 'venge His death, who died on rood for me.'
This comely King, as chronicles now say,
With a blithe heart, to bed did take his way,
His girdle slackened, slips his robes withal,
For sloth of slumber soon asleep doth fall.
But, passed the midnight hour, his mood doth change,
Morn brings a dream both marvellous and strange,
And when that dreadful dream to end was sped
The King, for doubt he deemed him well nigh dead:
Sends for his sages, doth his terror own —

'Since I was formed such fright I ne'er have known!
Now search out speedily, my vision read,
Right readily will I rehearse the deed —
Methought in woodland wild was I astray,
And wist not whither I should take my way,
For wolves, wild swine, and wicked beasts, methought,
Walked in that wilderness, my harm sought;
And loathly lions, from their teeth so white
Did lick the blood of many a loyal knight.
I thro' the forest fled, where flowers waxed high,
For fear of the foul things I did espy;
I gained a meadow, mountains closed it in,
None merrier on mid-earth a man might win;
Enclosed it was, encompassed all around,
While freshest herbs and clover clad the ground,
And round the vale were silver vines, I ween,
With grapes of gold, greater I ne'er have seen!
And set with arbours, and all kinds of tree,
And gardens good, and birds, I there did see,
And all the fruit that earth for food doth bear
On ordered hedges, freely flourished there.
No dew, down-dropping, for their harm might lie
Thro' the day's drought the flowerets all were dry.
In that fair dale, down from the clouds, did 'light
In diapered weeds, a duchess duly dight,
In silken surcoat, changely hued, and made,
Down to the hems with broideries o'er-laid,

Yard-long the lappets there ye might behold,
Lined and reversed with ribbons all of gold;
Brooches and besants, of bright stones a store,
Her robe, at back and breast, they studded o'er.
With coif and coronal arrayed so fair
None with her colour comely might compare.
A wheel she whirled with these her hands so white,
In fashion quaint she turned it as she might;
Red gold the rowel, with royal stones inlaid,
With rubies red, and jewels fair arrayed.
Splendid, the spokes with silvern rays they shone,
A spear-length from the centre sprang each one.
Thereon a chair of silver gleaming bright
Carbuncle's changing hues thereon gave light,
And to that wheel arow, see, kings do cling
Each with a crown that doth asunder spring;
Six from that seat had fallen suddenly,
Each, by himself, these words spake mournfully:
"That e'er I ruled a realm, it rues me now,
No king so rich e'er reigned on earth, I trow;
Whenas in rout I rode, I recked for naught
Save riot and revelry, o'er ransom brought,
Thus did I spend my days till life was past,
And thus full drearily, am damned at last."
A little man, the first, who lay below,
Lean in the loin, and loathly all to show,
Grey were his locks, a yard-length long, I ween,

His flesh and body handled ill had been.
Brighter that hero's eyes than silver white,
Else, as an egg's yolk, yellow he to sight.
"Lord was I," quoth that man "of lands enow,
All folk on earth did to my bidding bow,
No rag for covering now is left to me
But lost am I, as ye may surely see!"
The second sire who followed on that knight,
Sadder in arms, more steadfast to my sight,
Suffering, he sighed, and spake these words to me:
"As lord and sovereign did I rule yon sea,
Ladies to lock me in their arms were fain,
Now is my lordship lost in endless pain."
The third, of shoulders broad, stalwart and strong,
Ill man to threaten there where folk might throng,
Dropped was his diadem, with stones so bright,
Inset with diamonds as erstwhile dight —
"In diverse realms," he spake, "men did me dread,
Now for my dole I'm damned among the dead."
The fourth, a fair man he, of force in fight,
No fairer figure e'er was formed to sight;
"Fierce for the Faith was I whiles I had power,
In far lands famed, and of all kings the flower,
Faded, alas, my face, and foul my lot,
Fallen from high, and friendless, and forgot!"
Fairer the fifth to see than others all,
Forceful and fierce, his lips they foamed withal,

With all his might a spoke he gripped right well,
But yet he failed, full fifty feet he fell,
And sprang again, straining with arms outspread,
Gripping the spear-length spokes these words he said:
"In Syria sire, alone I bare command,
Sov'reign and seigneur of full many a land,
Now from my solace fallen suddenly,
For this my sin, yon seat is reft from me!"
The sixth, a psalter in fair binding bare,
In silken cover sewn, and broidered fair,
A harp and sling with flint stones he displayed,
Plaint of his griefs, I trow, full soon he made:
"Men deemed me in my days, for deeds so bold,
One of the doughtiest men e'er found on mold,
But in my greatest strength she wrought my fall,
This maiden mild, who here doth move us all."
Two kings were climbing, clambering on high,
The crest that crowned the wheel fain to come nigh,
"In days to come this chair, its gems of worth,
We'll challenge, as the chiefest men on earth."
Chalk-white those knights in cheek, I trow, and fair,
But tho' they strove they ne'er achieved that chair.
The first, with forehead broad, was fair to see,
Never a knight of fairer face than he,
Robed in rich raiment of a noble blue,
And flowered with fleur-de-lys of golden hue.
Clad was the other all in silver clean,

With comely carven cross, of golden sheen,
Four crosslets craftily the cross surround
Whereby that King, I trow, was Christian found.
Then did I go my way, that maid to greet,
"Welcome, I wis!" quoth she, "'t is well we meet,
Of all the men who, valiant, lived below,
My will shouldst worship, if thou didst but know;
In war thy worship all was won thro' me,
With friendly favours have I prospered thee,
Thou, and thy men, have found, i' faith, my might,
'T was I felled Frollo, with his froward knights,
Therefore the fruits of France to thee are free,
Thou shalt achieve the chair, chosen by me,
Above Earth's chosen chieftains shalt thou be!"
With slender hands lightly she lifted me,
Sceptre in hand, she set me in the chair,
Then with a comb she lightly combed my hair,
That the crisp curls were from the crown outspread,
A diadem, fair dight, set on my head;
Then offered me an orb, where bright stones shone,
Azure enamelled, pictured was thereon
The earth, with the salt sea encircled round,
In sign that I was Sire and Sovereign found.
A brand she brought me with a hilt so bright,
Bade me to wield the blade — "'T is mine of right
And many with its blow have lost their life,
Whiles thou didst strive, it failed thee not in strife!"

Swift sped she with the wheel, as seemed her good,
Unto the thickets of that wondrous wood,
No prince on earth such orchard sure might own,
So proud was planted Paradise alone!
She bade the boughs bend down, and give me there
The best that on their branches high they bare;
At her behest, with one consent did bow
The highest branches in that wood, I trow.
She bade me pluck the fruit, nor sparing be,
"O! valiant knight, the fruits to thee are free,
Reach to the ripest, glut thyself thereon,
Rejoice right royally, for Rome is won!
I'll whirl the wheel as best shall profit thee,
Rich wine, in cups well rinsed, I'll reach to thee!"
Then went she to the well beside the wood,
From whence the wine gushed forth, a wondrous flood,
Caught up a cup-full, covered it full fair,
And bade me deeply drink, and pledge her there.
Thus for an hour she led me to and fro
With all the love and liking maid might show;
But at the midday, lo! her mood did change
To menace marvellous, and words full strange,
When I upon her cried, she knit her brow;
"By Christ who made me, King, be silent now!
Sped is thy sport, thy life shalt lose, I trow,
In lordship and delight hast lived enow!"
About she whirls the wheel, and I, withal,

Whirled undermost, was shattered with the fall.
My chin was chopped asunder with the chair,
For chill I've shivered since I so must fare,
Then, all dream-weary, did I wake, I wis —
Read thou my woe, and say what meaneth this!'
'Lord,' quoth the sages, 'Fortune faileth thee,
Thy foe shalt find her wheresoe'er thou be,
Hast climbed thy highest, naught remains in store,
Trow us, no challenge thou achievest more.
Much blood hast shed, much sinless folk hast slain
Thro' this, thy pride, in many a king's domain,
Now shrive thee of thy shame, shape well thy part,
Forewarned art thou, O King! lay it to heart.
In France found abbeys, thine the fruits to hold,
For Frollo, Ferraunt, and their fierce knights bold.
Thro' thee, a stranger here in France, they fell —
By those kings be thou warned, and ponder well
Who, conquerors acclaimed, on earth bare crown —
First, Alexander, to whom all bowed down;
Hector of Troy, champion in chivalry;
Next Julius Cæsar, held for giant he,
In journeys gentle, judged by lords aright;
The fourth, Sir Judas, a right noble knight,
Masterful Maccabee, mighty in field;
Then Joshua, who arms did joyful wield,
And in Jerusalem had joy for share —
The sixth dear David, of all kings that were

One of the doughtiest is he deemed aright,
For with a sling he slew, by skilful sleight,
Goliath great, a giant grim to meet,
And in his days indited psalms so sweet.
Now in the Psalter set with words full fair —
Those climbing kings I now, in sooth, declare,
The first is Carolus, who France shall hold,
He shall be cruel and keen, a conqueror bold,
Countries by conquest shall he win enow
And gain the Crown Christ ware upon His brow;
And that same lance, that leapt unto His heart
When on the Cross He hung, with nails' sore smart,
Knightly, for Christendom he shall regain.
Godfrey, the other, who shall 'venge God's pain
Upon Good Friday, with his gallant knights,
The lord he of Lorraine by father-right,
Shall in Jerusalem have joy for meed, —
Recovering the Cross by knightly deed,
With chrisom anointed, shall as king be crowned —
No duke hath in his days such destiny found
Nor known such grief thro' testing of the truth —
Fortune doth fetch thee to fulfil, in sooth,
Their number, nine all told, of noblest name,
Writ in romance shall be for knightly fame;
Renowned and reckoned kings of royal meed
And judged on Doomsday, for their doughty deeds,
(The doughtiest they, of all on earth who dwell) —

For kings and clerks shall of your doings tell,
Your conquests keep in chronicle for aye.
The woodland wolves, and the wild beasts, now they
Be wicked men, who waste and worry all
Thy realm, thou absent, on thy folk they fall,
Aliens, and men from distant lands they be —
Within ten days shall tidings come to thee
Of mischief chanced since thou afar didst fare;
Make no delay, thy deeds of ill declare
Or thy rash works thou shalt repent withal.
Man, mend thy mood ere mischief thee befall,
And meek, for thy soul's meed, for mercy call.'

THE DEATH OF GAWAIN

Gone is Sir Gawain! his good fight is o'er
No man may aid him, pity 't is the more!
Gone is Sir Gawain! who did rule aright,
From Gower to Guernsey, many a noble knight,
Wales' and Glamorgan's gallant knights and true
For sorrow 'stonied, joy no more they knew.
Swift turned King Frederick, and fair and free
Asked of that traitor who the knight should be:
'In thy fair kingdom, say, this knight didst know?
Of what race he be sprung swift to me show;
What knight was he who bare those arms so gay,
The golden griffin, thou but now didst slay?
Greatly he grieved us, so God help me now,

Smote down our good men, did us harm enow,
Sternest in strife of those who steel might wield
Our folk he 'stonied, scared them from the field.'
Sir Mordred answered him with speech full fair:
'Matchless on mold that man was reckoned e'er,
That was Sir Gawain good, the gladdest knight
And the most gracious to whom God gave light.
Happiest in arms, the hardiest of his hand,
In hall most courteous who 'neath Heaven did stand.
The while he lived as lordliest leader known
And many lands his lion courage own.
Hadst thou but known him, King, in other days —
His knowledge, knighthood, all his kindly ways,
For this, his doughtiness, and deeds so fair
Dole for his death thro' all thy days shouldst share!'
Therewith that traitor's tears fall fast as rain,
Swift turned aside, he speaketh not again,
But weeping, went his way, and curseth still
The hour he wrought the deed that worked such ill.
And, thinking on this thing, his heart, it aches,
Sighing for kinship's blood his way he takes,
For when that renegade remembrance found,
Recalled the reverence of the Table Round,
Repentance sore, and ruth, were his that tide —
Away he rode, nor longer would he bide,
For dread of our King's coming doth he ride
To Cornwall, heavy-hearted, mourning sore
The kinsman lying dead upon the shore.

Cleanness

Cleanness

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST

Belshazzar bold bethought him on a tide
Vainglorious, to vaunt his power and pride —
('T is not enow the sinner sinful be
Save all the world his wickedness shall see!) —
Thro' Babylon Belshazzar cried his ban,
Thro' Chaldea's country swift, the call, it ran,
From near and far his nobles, gathering all,
On a set day should seek the Soudan's hall;
For such a feast that man was fain to make
Thither each kingdom's king his way should take,
That each duke, dutiful, and lord so dear,
Should loyally to his liege lord draw near,
To render reverence, his revels share,
Look on his lemans, and his ladies fair.
Rich men, to praise his royalty they sought,
And barons bold to Babylon were brought,
Yea, many a band to Babylon was bound,
Kaisers and kings within that court are found,
Lords of the land with ladies thither throng
To name their number were a task too long.
So broad it was the burg, so big and high,
Stood in a fair space 'neath the starry sky,

Proud on a plain 't was placed in goodly state,
Swept on each side by seven waters great.
Its walls, so wondrous wrought, it high doth rear
Begirt with battlements in carving clear;
Turreted towers, each twenty spears apart
While palls are proudly flung those walls athwart.
The palace proud, where pursuivants do fare,
Was long and large, and all alike foursquare;
Each side on soil was seven miles long, I ween,
Set in the midst the Soudan's seat was seen.
In pride that palace passed the others all
Alike in work, in wonder, and in wall;
For houses high within that hall had place
Broad built in bay, wherein a horse might race.
Whenas it touched the term the feast was set,
Thither the dukes were drawn, on daïs met;
Belshazzar busked him for the board anon,
Bright shone the stones of this, his stately throne;
That goodly hall, it held full many a knight,
And barons bold were at the side-boards dight.
Dressed was the daïs for the monarch's might
And for his concubines in costume bright;
Swift all in seat they set, to serve begin,
Loud blares the trumpet blast the burg within,
With ringing notes the roof and walls resound,
Broad banners, gleaming golden, droop around.
The bread on dishes broad on high they bear

Silver to sight, I trow, and served full fair,
As lofty lodges lifted, carven high,
Pared out of paper, gilded cunningly,
With fierce baboons above, and beasts below,
And fowls that flit between in fluttering row.
In ynde and azure 't was enamelled fair —
A steed, this burden on his back he bare.
The drums make noise enow, the pipe's shrill note,
Timbrel and tabor mingling, tinkling float,
While cymbals, sonorous, respond withal —
Men busk them busily about the hall,
So with swift service do they set the board,
Solace, with diverse course, that self-same lord
Who, with his loves, the feast doth linger o'er —
Of wine that warmed his heart too fast they pour,
The fumes breathe on his brain, embroil his mind,
Weakening his wit, to folly all inclined;
His wandering looks his ladies fair behold,
His hall, beset with baronage so bold,
Therewith a dotage deep to his head drave
A caitif counsel to himself he gave;
Loudly, as master, doth his marshal call,
Commands the coffers he unclose withal,
Fetch forth the vessels that his father bore —
(Nebuchadnezzar, noble king, of yore —)
Reft from the kirk, when, with his conquering knights
Jerusalem and Judah felt his might.

'Now bring them to my board, for beverage clear
These dames shall drink therefrom, whom I hold dear,
By customs courteous they soon shall see
None like Belshazzar bounteous may be!'
They tell the treasurer the King's behest,
With keys he doth unclose full many a chest,
To hall they bear full many a burthen bright,
Covered the cupboards are with cloths so white,
Gems of Jerusalem, and jewels gay,
A seemly sight, that hall's sides now array;
The brazen altar do they set in place,
Above, the crown of gold in gleaming grace.
That which by bishop's hands had once been blest,
Anointed with the blood of beasts, the best
For solemn sacrifice, — With savour good
'Fore Heaven's high lord, in praise erst-while it stood,
Now is it set to serve Satan, the black,
And bold Belshazzar, who no boast doth lack.
High on the altar noble vessels see,
With curious craft all carven cunningly,
Solomon set him, seven years and more,
With all the Lord had lent to him of lore,
To fix their form, and have them wrought full fair, —
Basins so bright of burnished gold were there,
Azure enamelled, ewers to match them all,
And covered cups, fashioned as castle wall,
Builded 'neath battlements, in pillared wise,

And formed in figures of the strangest guise.
And every cup a tapering cover crowned,
Right featly fashioned as with turrets round,
While pinnacles appear in place between,
Branches and leaves embossed, above are seen,
And pies, and popinjays, upon each bough,
Who at pomegranates proudly peck, I trow.
Each bud on bough was glistening pearl and white,
And every fruit a jewel, flaming bright,
Sapphire and sardonyx, and topaz shine,
Amethyst, emerald, alabaunderryne,
Cassydrine, chrysolite, and ruby red,
Peridot, pinkardine, 'twixt pearls are spread;
So, twined and twisted, doth the fair design
Bold, on the border of each beaker shine.
Golden the goblets all, and graven fair;
The vials a fretwork fine of flowerets bare,
Upon the altar, see, they stand anon —
The candlestick men carry thither soon,
Upon the pillar poised, that many praise,
The brazen base the work on high doth raise.
Bright were its branches all, of golden sheen,
With spreading boughs, and birds inset between,
Of many kinds and manifold in hue
E'en as on wind with feathered wing they flew.
And in among the leaves the lamps shone bright,
Full fair it gleamed with many a lovely light.

Many the mortars were, the wax to hold,
Wroughten as burly beasts of burnished gold;
It was not wont its tapers there to waste
That erst the temple of the true God graced,
Before the shrine '*Sancta Sanctorum*' shone
Where God, by speech, unto His seers was known.
Thou may'st believe the Lord who rules the sky
Had little pleasure in such pleasantry,
That Gentiles, these, His gems, should so defile
That in His presence precious were somewhile
For solemn sacrifice, anointed yet
E'en at His summons who on high was set;
Now on the bench a boaster from them sups,
And, as the devil drunk, dotes in his cups.
Then He who wrought the world, waxed wroth withal
And, at their pleasure's point, purveys a fall,
But ere, in haste and ire, He harm hath wrought
Warning He gave, which they a wonder thought.
His goodly gear is got for gluttons' game,
In setting rich, and brightly starred with flame —
Belshazzar bold, doth bid them in this wise —
'Serve vintage in these vessels!' thus he cries,
And swift the swains do at his summons spring,
Clasp cup in hand, to carry to each king,
Each, eager, waiteth on his master's will,
The bowls so bright, with wine they swiftly fill,
Rich metal, touching metal, rang full loud

As men to catch the cups together crowd,
Clashing, the maids the covers cast away,
As song from psaltery ring the sounds so gay.
The fool on daïs set, he drank his fill,
The dukes and princes, dressed in order still,
Knights, concubines, mirthful and merry all,
The cup each held he drained to dregs withal.
Long drank the lords of these same liquors sweet,
Their false gods glorify, their grace entreat,
That were of stocks and stones, silent for aye,
No voice may reach them, deaf and dumb are they!
All their good gods of gold by name they call,
Belfegor, Beliel, Beelzebub — Yea all!
Honoured them highly as in Heaven they sat
But God who all good gives, Him they forgat!
Then lo! the folk behold a sight of fear
Made first to King, then to his courtiers clear,
Within the palace, plain upon the wall,
Where clear the light of candlestick did fall,
Appeared a palm with pointel, form of fright,
Grisly and great, and grimly did it write!
Naught but a fist, failing the wrist alway,
Plain on the plaster letters doth portray.
When bold Belshazzar saw the hand that stead
Fear smote his heart, all dazed was he with dread,
His cheeks they paled, and past is all his cheer,
His joints are strained at that strange stroke and drear,

His knees together knock, close cling his thighs,
Beating his palms, he stares in sore surprise,
Howls as a mad dog doth for dread withal
Watching the while the writing on the wall.
E'en so the hand the runes wrote rough, and then,
When it had scratched the script with pointed pen
Like as a plough-share furrows carves in clay
Straight from their sight it vanished swift away.
But large the letters loomed on plaster there —
Soon as the King might speak for stress of care
He sent with speed unto his sages all
To read aright what there was writ on wall.
'My flesh doth creep those fingers grim before —'
Scholars to find the skill, they vex them sore,
But ne'er was one so wise those words to wit
Nor tell what lore or language there was writ.
What tale or tidings should betokened be —
Then bold Belshazzar, well nigh mad was he,
Bade thro' the city seek for seers, who bare
Repute for witchcraft, wise as wizards were,
To deal with devilry-diviners fair —
'All that be clerks unto my court now call,
Make known the marvel that doth here befall,
Call loudly: "*He who to the King makes known*
And doth expound in speech what here is shown,
Doth make the matter melt my mind within
That I the wit of this same writing win,

In purple gown, and gear so gay, shall fare,
A golden collar round his throat shall bear,
Primate and prince of all my clerks is he,
And of my noblest lords the third shall be;
The richest of my realm, with me to ride,
And, save two only, shall be third in pride."'
The cry was raised, and thither straight they came,
Clerks of Chaldea, known for wisdom's fame,
As satraps sage, in sorcery well skilled;
Witches and warlocks soon the hall have filled,
Diviners, versed in magic, dreams to read,
Sorcerers, exorcists, they thither speed,
All on those letters looked, and stood amazed,
As they on leather of my left boot gazed!
The King, he cried aloud, his robes he tore,
Lo! how he cursed his clerks for churls, and swore
Full oft, that he would hang the harlots high —
So witless was the wight, to madness nigh.
The chief Queen, in her chamber, heard him chide;
Whenas the tidings true were told that tide
E'en of that changing chance in the chief hall,
The lady, her lord's loss to cure withal,
Stately descends the steps, the King doth seek,
On cold earth kneeling, careful, thus doth speak,
In words of worship, wisely framed, I trow: —
'Great King,' so quoth the Queen, 'earth's Kaiser thou,
Long last thy life, be length of days thy meed,

Why hast thou rent thy robe for lack of rede
Because this folk these letters failed to scan,
And hast within thine hold, I 've heard, a man
Inspired by God's own Spirit, source of sooth,
Fulfilled with science to shew forth the truth,
Reveal each hidden thing, each venture wild?
Full oft he checked, with holy speech and mild,
Thy father's anger hot, and counsel caught,
To tell Nebuchadnezzar's troubled thought;
His dreams divining, did the truth translate,
By counsel covered him from cruel fate.
All speired of him, in speech, he told full well,
Sped by the Spirit, which did in him dwell,
Of the great God, who ruleth evermore.
For deep divinity, and for dread lore,
Thy father bold him Belteshazzar named,
As Daniel, dread diviner, is he famed;
In Judah's country was he captive caught,
And hither by Nabuzaradan brought,
A prophet of that province, this world's praise —
Now to the city send, seek thro' its ways,
With worship win him to thy will withal —
Tho' dark the matter marked upon the wall
He shall declare it as 't were wrought in clay —'
This, the Queen's counsel, do they take straightway,
Unto Belshazzar soon the man they bring,
Saluting low, he stood before the King;

Belshazzar swiftly spake: 'Good Sir,' quoth he,
'By tidings told me thou in truth shalt be
Prophet, from realms he raided once of yore,
My father, in thine heart is holy lore,
Thou hast the science hidden sooth to show
God's Spirit guides thee, who doth secrets know,
T' unveil the things that Heaven's high King doth hide —
A marvel we behold, and I, this tide
What there on wall is writ were fain to know,
Which all called clerks have, cowardly, failed to shew;
Can'st conquer it with cunning, I 'll thee 'quit,
If thou dost read aright what there is writ,
First tell me of this text, what it may be,
And then its meaning shalt make known to me,
I 'll keep the covenant I did declare,
Robe thee in purple cloth, and pall most fair,
Place round thy neck a ring of gold so bright,
In this, my kingdom make thee third in might,
Baron on bench, no less thy boon shall be!'
Then thus spake Daniel, straight, and speedily:
'Rich King of royal realm, God counsel bring,
For sooth it is, the Sovereign Lord and King
Sustained thy father in his high estate,
Did grant him o'er all governors to be great,
That all the world he wielded at his will, —
To whom God willeth well he prospers still,
Whose death He doth desire, done are His days;

Whom the Lord would uplift, He light doth raise,
And whom He would abase is laid full low —
Nebuchadnezzar's fate this same doth show —
Stablished his kingdom stood in God so strong,
His heart upon the Highest hoped full long,
That, from that Prince alone, all power passed —
While close in heart he held that counsel fast
To match His might there was no man on mould; —
Then there befell a time he waxed o'er bold,
For this, his lordship large, his life so high,
His own deeds, loomed so large before his eye,
That he forgat the high Prince, and His power,
And boastings blasphemous on God would shower,
His might with God's would measure, saying still —
"The God, I of this ground, to guide at will,
As He who, high in Heaven, His rule doth wield; —
If He hath formed the folk upon the field
I builded Babylon, — that burg so fair,
In stone established, doth my strength declare,
No man but I another such may make —"
Scarcely his lips the self-same words they spake
Ere that his ears a sovereign sound must fill: —
"Nebuchadnezzar, thou hast spoken ill,
Thy principality is past and gone,
Afar from men on moor shalt dwell alone,
Walk in the wilderness, with wild beasts meet,
A beast thyself, bracken and grass shalt eat.

With raging wolves, and with wild asses bide!"
So he departed, in his midmost pride
His solemn pomp and solace must he change
For care, an outcast he in countries strange;
Far, far, afield, where never folk may fare,
At heart distraught, none other thought he bare
Save that he be a beast, or ox, or bull,
He fares on all-fours, grass for food doth pull,
Eats hay as horse when herbs must fade and fail
Counts him for cow, whom once as King they hail.
Thus seven summers o'er him passed, I trow,
His thighs beneath his trunk waxed thick enow,
With dew of heaven was he damp withal,
His tangled hair doth all about him fall,
Sheer from his shoulders o'er his limbs it flows
Twenty-fold twining, reaches to his toes;
Clotted as clay the strands together clung —
Spread o'er his breast, his beard, to earth it hung;
His brows, as briars, bristle broad cheeks o'er,
Hollow his eyes, as set 'neath caverns hoar,
Grey as a glede, and grim his claws to sight,
Crooked and keen, as doth beseem the kite;
And eagle-hued was he, and all o'er-grown
Till he His power who all things wrought doth own —
Who at His will doth kingdoms give or take —
His wits he wins that did him erst forsake,
To knowledge come, himself he knew, in sooth,

Loving the Lord, believed in very truth
None else than He all power in hand did hold —
Soon set again on seat, throned as of old,
Blithe of his coming did the barons bow,
His head its proper hue hath ta'en, I trow;
Set was his state, and settled, speedily —
But thou, Belshazzar, tho' his son thou be,
Seeing these signs with sight, set them at naught,
Against high Heaven didst uplift thy thought,
Bold boast and blasphemy against Him cast,
These, His fair vessels foul defiled at last,
Before thy barons thou hast had them brought,
That for His house and honour first were wrought
In cursèd hour for wenches wine didst pour
And brought the beverage this, thy board, before,
In bowls once blithely blest by Bishop's hand,
And in them praised thy gods, who lifeless stand
Made out of stocks and stones that stir nor move —
For gross transgression, God in Heaven above,
Hath sent into this hall this sight so drear,
This fist, whose fingers filled thy heart with fear,
Who, with rough pen rasped runes upon the wall;
The words here written, they shall be withal,
(Figured, I find this at Our Father's will)
Three, "*Mane*, *Tekel*, *Phares*" — Threefold still
The threat of punishment, I trow, is found
And I the speech would speedily expound:

"*Mane*" doth mean, the Mighty God hath well
Counted thy kingdom, doth its number tell,
Fulfilled it is, in faith to very end —
"*Tekel*" doth teach thee, so the term doth tend,
Thy reign is weighed, in balance hung, I ween,
Thy deeds of faith they all too few have been,
And for those faults "*Phares*" doth follow fair —
"*Phares*," forsooth, I find doth this declare:
"Past is thy Princedom, perished in this hour,
Thy reign reft from thee, Persians take thy power,
The Medes thy masters, thou art shorn of might!"' —
The King commands them there to clothe that wight
E'en as the cov'nant was, in cloth so fine,
In purple precious soon doth Daniel shine
Around his neck of gold a collar see,
Then was declaréd, by the Duke's decree,
By bold Belshazzar, men to him should bow,
(By the King's heralds thus 't was called, I trow,)
As the third prince approved, of privy train,
High o'er all others, save but only twain,
Nighest Belshazzar, both in burg and field,
Thus was it cried in court, as set and sealed.
Fain were the folk that followed him alway —
Thus dight was Daniel, ended was the day,
And night drew nigh, that many a woe must mark,
For ere again day dawned upon the dark

Dealt was that doom that Daniel had assured —
In solace the solemnity endured
Of that fair feast until the sun did fail
And the bright sky's fair hues did fade and pale;
Murky the weather waxed, the mist-clouds fly
O'er Heaven's path where meadows lowly lie.
Each noble to his home he hies full fast,
And supper soon with song is over-past,
For the fourth night a fellowship they sware —
With bliss Belshazzar to his bed they bare
Rest as he list, he riseth never more —
In flocks, his foes, the fields they cover o'er
Long to assail the land in wait they lie
At this same hour, assembled suddenly, —
None in that dwelling wist, and no man heeds —
Daring Darius, duke he of the Medes
Proud Prince of Persia, lord of India's might
With many a legion large, and armèd knight
Who for Chaldea's spoil a space had spied
Now, in the darkness thronging, thither hied.
Crossing clear waters, they the walls beset,
Long ladders lift, full swift aloft they get,
Steal stilly thro' the town, ere any wake
Within an hour of nightfall entry make.
No man affrighting, on they steal, until
The palace principal they reach, so still;
Then, a great rout, to onslaught fierce they sprang

While bursting blast on high from bright brass rang,
A cry arose that many doth affright,
And men were, sleeping, slain, ere 'scape they might.
Each house was harried ere man might draw breath,
Belshazzar in his bed was beat to death,
His blood and brains upon the cloth are flung,
The King, in curtain, by his heels he hung,
They draw him by his feet in foul despite —
Who, doughty, drank that day from vessels bright,
Is worth no more than dog in ditch that lies —
The master of the Medes, with morn doth rise,
Daring Darius, dight on throne that day,
Hath seized the city — peace he made straightway
With all the barons who to him did bow.
For the lord's sins that land was lost, I trow,
For his bold blasphemy, who did defile
The vessels of God's house, holy erstwhile.
Cursed for uncleanness he, and caught therein,
Cast down from dignity for deeds of sin,
From this world's worship was he thrust aside,
And, of the joys of highest Heaven denied,
Never might he Our Lovely Lord behold —
Thus in a threefold tale I now have told
How that uncleanness doth offend the sight
Of Our Dear Lord, who dwells in Heaven's height,
Doth work in Him to wrath, stirs up His ire,

Cleanness

Cleanness His comfort is, and His desire,
Who shine in seemliness shall see His face —
That we this vesture wear God send us grace,
To serve aye in His sight, in sweet solace.
Amen.

Patience

Patience

JONAH

In Judah's land it chanced, in days long gone,
A noble prophet lived, as Jonah known,
God's voice awoke him, woeful all to hear,
And, roughly ringing, roared within his ear:
'Arise,' it quoth: 'and run, nor make delay,
Speed forth to Nineveh, thy speech let stay,
And through that city cry, in street and square,
That which I bid thee speak that hour, nor spare.
For well I wot the dwellers wicked be,
Their malice much, nor more I would them see;
But vengeance on their villainy and venom wreak —
Hie thither hastily, mine errand speak!'
Whenas that sound was still, that marvel brought.
Wrathful he waxed, and, angry, thus he thought
'If I His bidding do, bring them this tale,
Be ta'en in Nineveh, 't will be my bale;
He telleth me those traitors fierce shall be,
Bear I these tidings, they'll lay hands on me,
Pen me in prison, in the stocks to pine,
Bind fast in fetters, blind these eyes of mine,
A message marvellous for man to bear
To foes, and to accurséd fiends declare!

Methinks my God doth will my grief and pain,
For some desert I'm destined to be slain.'
'Nay,' quoth the prophet, 'for no peril I
Approach the city, but away will fly,
I will to Tarsus, tarry there, and hide,
When I be lost, lightly He'll let me bide.'
Then swift by rising, rapidly doth speed
Jonah to Jaffa, chafing at the need,
Swearing for naught he'ld suffer such sore pain, —
The Father, who him formed, tho' He were fain
To help — 'Our Sire who sits on seat so high
In glory glowing, little shall espy
Tho' I in Nineveh all naked stand,
Rent on the rood, by many a ribald hand.'
So passes he to port, passage to pay,
Finds a fair ship ready to sail straightway,
Speaks with the sailors, payeth them, forthright,
To take him swift to Tarsus, an they might.
He trode the deck, and they their gear uptake,
Catch up the cross-sail, fast the cables make;
Winding the windlass, do the anchors weigh,
Swift make to spar the bowline fast alway.
Gather the guide-ropes, as the great sails fall,
To larboard lying, catch the wind withal,
The blithe breeze, blowing, bellies out the sheet,
The sweet ship swiftly from the shore doth fleet.
As Jonah, never Jew so joyful there,

Deeming from doom divine afar to fare,
He deemed that Wisdom which the world did plan
Had no might on the main to vex a man.
Ah! Witless wretch, who wouldst from suffering flee,
In plight more perilous and pain shalt be!
For fancy false doth flatter him, I ween,
Samaria shunned, of God he'ld not be seen.
That far His glance was flung, full well he'ld read,
And oft had conned what erst a king had said,
David, on daïs dight, whose words shall be
Set in the psalter for all men to see —
'Oh, foolish folk! Who thus forget so oft
He Who made all things, tho' He dwell aloft,
Deem ye He hears not who the ear hath wrought?
And seeth not, who sight to man hath brought?'
He dreads no dint who for old age doth doat —
Far on the flood, to Tarsus doth he float,
But yet I trow, betimes he 'll be o'er-ta'en,
The bolt he shot, falls short, and fails its aim;
For He who wieldeth all, and all doth wot,
And ever waits and wakes, He wiles hath got,
Forces Himself hath made He forth doth call,
In wrath they wake, for wrathful He withal.
'Eurus and Aquilon, from Eastern throne
Blow at My bidding on the waters lone!'
Small space was there I trow 'twixt speech and deed,
Fain were the twain to work His will with speed;

Anon from the North-East wakes noise anew,
When both winds blow upon the waters blue.
The storm-wrack drives, loud rumbling, o'er the sky,
The swelling sea doth sorely sob and sigh,
Winds, on the waters wan they, wrestling, close,
The waves waxed wroth, to towering heights uprose,
Then rushed adown th' abyss, where fishes dwell,
Nor there might find a rest, but, surging, swell;
When wind and wave and ship together meet
In joyless gin hath Jonah set his feet!
The ship reeled round upon the roaring tide,
The gear, I trow, the buffets might not bide,
Hurled on a heap alike were helm and stern,
And mast and rope were riven in their turn,
The sail, it swept the sea, the ship must sup
The water cold, the cry loud riseth up,
The cords are cut, and overboard are cast
While many a lad, he leapt, and baled full fast,
Threw out the threatening water — all were fain
To live, no life so lowly but is gain.
Busy, they overboard their ballast threw,
Their bags, their feather-beds, their raiment new,
Their kists, their coffers, and their cargo all
To light that boat, and calm to find withal.
But ever louder waxed the wind's shrill cry,
More wroth the waves, the sea ran yet more high,
Weary and worn, they wist no wile, save they,

Each to his god, for grace should straitly pray;
Some vowed to Vernagu a solemn vow,
Some to Diana, some to Neptune, bow,
Mahoun and Margot call — on Moon and Sun —
Each lauds the lord who hath his fealty won.
Then spake the boldest, nigh unto despair,
'I trow some lawless wretch doth with us fare,
Who, grieving God, hath gat himself herein,
Mars by misdeed, and sinks us with his sin.
Here cast we lots,' the leader quoth, 'and he
On whom the fate doth fall thrown forth shall be.
The guilty gone, we, as good men and true,
May trust Who rules this wrack our plight shall rue.'
To this assent they set, assembling there
From every corner come their doom to dare;
Beneath the hatch the leader light doth spring
The folk to fetch, and to the lot to bring,
But ne'er a man he misses at that tide
Save the Jew, Jonah, who himself would hide;
Fearing the flood, before it had he fled
To the boat's bottom, made on boards his bed,
To oar fast holding for the heavens' roar,
He fell asleep, and slumbering doth snore.
With hasty foot the pilot, pushing, wakes,
Bidding him rise, his dream he roughly breaks;
Then with a hook he hauls him up by hand,
His garment grappling, on the deck he stands,

Rough, he arraigns him for what reason he
In such a stress of storm asleep should be?
They set their lots, and swift and surely cast
The lot doth light on Jonah at the last.
Then, with one voice they loudly on him call:
'What the foul fiend hast done, thou wretched thrall?
What seek'st thou on the sea, thou sinful soul
For thy deserts to deal us doom and dole?
Hast man, no lord, no god on whom to cry,
That thou dost surely sleep when death draws nigh?
What land doth own thee? Say, what here hast sought?
Whither in world wouldst fly? What wrong hast wrought?
Behold thy doom is dight for thine ill deed
Give glory to thy god ere hence thou speed!'
'A Hebrew, I,' he quoth, 'of Israel's fold,
I worship Him, I wis, who wrought of old
The world, the welkin, winds, and starry height,
And all its dwellers with His word of might,
And all this mischief, it was made for me
In that I grieved my God, and guilty be.
Carry me to the edge, and cast me out
If good hap ye would see, nor have more doubt.'
By signs the sailors understand, they see
How, from God's face he, foolish, fain would flee.
Then fear upon them fell, in sore affright
They bend them to the oar, to row with might;
In haste they hie them, with long oars that day

Since they have slipped their sail, to make some way
They heave and haul on high, themselves to aid,
Bootless to oar they bend, no way they made,
The foaming flood hath splintered every oar
Naught in their hand they held to help them more,
No comfort could they find, nor counsel see
Save Jonah judged and punished swift should be.
But first they pray the Prince of prophets there
To grant His grace that they may grieve Him ne'er
That they in sinless blood their hands should stain
Tho' this, His servant, should by them be slain.
By head and foot they, swiftly, Jonah seize,
Straightway they cast him to the surging seas.
Scarce is he outcast when the storm doth cease,
Settles the sea, the wind it sinks to peace,
Torn was their tackle, tottering on the wave,
Stiff streams, the straining ship, they forward drave,
A sweeter current swept them to the bank —
Leaping to land, loudly they render thanks
To God the Merciful, in Moses' way,
With solemn vows and sacrifice that day;
Grant He be God alone, nor peer hath He —
Tho' they rejoice, Jonah, in dread is he,
No sore he suffers, yet hath peril known,
For what befell that wight, in waters thrown
A wonder were, save Holy Writ had shown.

Jonah the Jew hath now been judged to drown,
Forth from the shattered ship men throw him down,
A wildly weltering whale, as fate decreed,
From the depth driven, by the boat doth speed,
'Ware was he of that wight who sought the tide
And, swiftly sweeping, oped his swallow wide,
The folk yet hold his feet, the fish him grips,
With never touch of tooth thro' throat he slips.
With swinging strokes he cleaves the surging sea,
By rocks so rough, and strands drifts rapidly;
Within his maw the man, entranced by dread,
Small wonder if for woe he were nigh dead,
For had not Heaven's high King, by might so great
Warded this wretch in monster's bowels strait
Who might believe, by lore of any kind,
That one might live for long, so close confined?
Saved was he by that Sire who sits on high
When hopeless, he in the whale's womb did lie.
Thro' the deep driven, waters dark and drear,
Cold was his comfort, huge his care and fear,
For strange the fate that fell to him withal
Launched from the boat, in a beast's jaws to fall,
And down his throat with ne'er a check to glide
As mote thro' minster door — his jaws so wide!
Then, gliding thro' the gills, thro' slippery slime,
In at a gut, that seemed a road that time,
Heels over head, downward did Jonah fall

Into a space as broad as any hall,
There, setting fast his feet, he groped, until
He in the stomach stood, which stank full ill,
In slime and sorrow, savouring of hell
Built was his bower, who far from bale would dwell!
He seeks and searches where he best may bide
Within the navel naught he found that tide
Nor rest nor rescue — Naught but mire doth meet
Where'er he seeketh — But God still is sweet,
On Him at last he leans, on Him doth cry —
'Prince, pity now Thy prophet's misery,
Tho' I be foolish, fickle, false in truth,
Waive now Thy vengeance, be not void of ruth,
Tho' guilty I of guile, false prophet shown
As God all goods and glory be Thine own!
Have mercy on Thy man's misdeeds this hour,
As Lord of land and water prove Thy power!'
So creeps he to a corner, wherein he
From all defiling filth might find him free,
There safe and sound, save for the darkness deep
As in the ship he did aforetime sleep,
He in a bowel of that beast abode
Three days and nights, and ever thought on God,
His might His mercy measureless, I wis,
Knows Him in bale whom he had fled in bliss.
Ever the whale doth plunge thro' weltering deeps,
By many a region rough the road he keeps,

A morsel in his maw doth surely stick
Which, tho' it be full small, yet makes him sick;
Well ware was Jonah, well he heard that tide
The beast turn on his back, and lash his side,
Swift supplication doth the prophet make,
In this wise, as I ween, with words he spake.

'Lord, I have called on Thee, in care so fell
Didst hear me from this hole, the womb of hell;
I called, and Thou my feeble voice didst hear, —
Hast dipped me in the deep's heart, dim and drear,
The torrent of Thy flood did flow me round
From gutters gushing, pools that know no ground,
Swollen by striving streams, Thy waters all
As o'er dam dashing, on my head they fall.
And yet I say, set here in sea-depths fast,
Tho' sorrowful, and from Thine eyes outcast,
Dissevered from Thy sight, I hope alway
Thy temple courts to tread, to Thee to pray!
Wrapped round in water to my woe this tide
Th' abyss doth bind the body where I bide,
The purling waves, they play above my head,
Yea, in man's utmost need am I this stead,
The bars of such a prison me confine
That I no land may reach — my life is Thine.
Thou shalt release me, and forego Thy right
In that I trust Thy mercy's matchless might;

Patience

When pangs of anguish pierced my soul, then I
To my rich Lord returning, raised my cry,
Prayed Him that, piteous, he lend his ear
That in His holy house my prayer he hear.
I with Thy marvels dealt for many a day —
Now, of a truth, I wot, unwise be they
Who trust in vanity, and trifles vain,
For all is naught, be mercy from us ta'en!
But I devoutly vow, in veritie,
To do Thee sacrifice, when safe I be,
A holy gift I'll give, I'll pledge mine oath,
Obey Thy bidding swiftly, on my troth!'
Our Father to the fish did fiercely cry,
Bade him spit Jonah forth on spar so dry;
The whale wends at His will, he finds a ford,
Throws up the prophet, e'en as bade the Lord,
So swept into the sand, in vesture soaked,
Much need had Jonah then to wash his cloak!
Thus was he brought to bide, in veritie,
Within that land from which he thought to flee.

Pearl

Pearl

I

1

PEARL, full pleasant for prince's pay
To cleanly set in gold so clear,
From Orient lands, I dare to say,
Found I never its precious peer.
So round, so choice, the pearl alway,
So small, so smooth, a shining sphere,
Wherever I judged of jewels gay
I set it singly, without compeer.
Alas! I lost my pearl in a bower,
From grass to ground I let it slide,
And I pine, sore wounded by Love's fierce power,
For that spotless pearl that was once my pride!

2

Since then in that spot have I lingered long
Where it fell from my hand, and with many a sigh,
Have I mourned the joy that had cured my wrong
And lifted my hope and my bliss on high.
Yet the dart of sorrow is over strong;
My heart for sadness is parched and dry,
Yet heard I never so sweet a song
As woke that still hour with its melody.

Forsooth, I have thought full many a thought
Of how its fairness the clay doth hide;
Earth, on a gem hast thou ruin wrought,
O, spotless pearl that was once my pride!

3

Forth from that spot shall spices flow
Where such a treasure to ruin hath run,
White, blue, and red, shall the blossoms blow
Their hues shine fairly beneath the sun.
The earth where my pearl now lieth low
Nor flower nor fruit shall for ever shun,
He who wisheth grass must the dead seed sow
Else never the wheat to the ear were won.
Good seed I ween, shall bear good fruit,
Nor seed so seemly in vain hath died,
But spices fragrant shall find their root
In that spotless pearl that was once my pride!

4

It chanced that I came to that spot one day
Whereof I tell, to that bower so green,
'T was August, the year's high holiday
When the corn it falleth 'neath sickle keen.
Where erstwhile my pearl from my hold did stray
The flowerets flourished so bright and sheen,

Gilly-flower, ginger, gromwell grey,
With peonies blushing in between.
    Fair was that bower in summer glow
    Yet a fairer fragrance was wafted wide
    From that place where she dwells, as well I know,
    That spotless pearl, that was once my pride!

5

I clasped my hands then for sorrow cold,
On that spot I found me in fetters caught,
A doleful dirge in my heart it tolled
Though Reason peace to my soul had taught.
I mourned my pearl that was there in hold,
Within me doubt with doubt fast fought,
Through comfort of Christ had I fain been bold,
Yet my will was to sorrow in bondage brought.
    Prostrate I fell on that flowery mead,
    Fragrance o'ercame me at that tide,
    And slumber still'd me to better rede
    Of that spotless pearl, that was once my pride!

II 6

From that spot my spirit sprang forth in space,
My body enwrapped in dream did lie,
My soul it had fared, by God's good grace,
To behold adventures and marvels high.
I wist not whither my way to trace

But cloven cliffs rose before mine eye,
Towards a forest I set my face,
Radiant were the rocks I might there descry!
No heart of man can conceive the light,
The gleaming glory, that glittered there,
No web e'er woven by dexterous wight
In fashion, I ween, was half so fair!

7

Girdled about was all the down
With crystal cliffs, so clear of hue,
Bright woods and holts the hill did crown
Their boles as azure as Indian blue.
As burnished silver they floated down,
The leaves, that a quivering shadow threw,
When the gleam of the glades was against them thrown
With shimmering sheen they shone anew.
And the gravel all that the ground o'er-lay
Was of Orient pearl, beyond compare,
The sun's own beams waxed pale and alway
Beholding that fashion, so wondrous fair!

8

The fashioning of those downs so bright
They bade my spirit all grief forswear,
Food to refresh me I found aright
So sweet a savour of fruits was there.

In peace the birdlings took their flight,
Of flaming hues, great and small they were,
Nor citole, nor viol, though touched aright
With their mirthful music might aye compare!
For when they sang in such sweet accord
And softly beat with their wings the air
Naught might such rapture to heart afford
As hearkening their fashion, so wondrous fair!

9

In sooth 't was fashioned in fairest wise
That forest, where fate led my feet that day,
Its glory I know not to devise
Nor tongue of man may its praise essay.
But ever I walked in gladsome wise,
No hill so steep that my steps might stay,
The further I journeyed, in fairer guise
Bloomed flowers, and foliage, and fruit alway.
Hedgerows, and border, and rivers' sheen
As threads of fine gold that hillside bare,
I won to a water those shores between,
Christ, but the fashion thereof was fair!

10

Oh, the fashioning of that goodly stream!
The banks were fair with beryl bright
Swooning sweet was the water's theme,

A murmuring music that rang aright.
Down in the deep as gems they gleam
The stones, that glow as thro' glass the light
Or e'en as the stars, while the weary dream,
Shine in the welkin in winter's night.
For every pebble within that pool
Was emerald, sapphire, or gem so rare,
And all alight was that water cool,
Ah, never was fashion half so fair!

III

11

The fashioning of the down and dale,
Of wood and water, and field so fair,
It bred in me bliss, and it banished bale,
Freed from distress, and destroyed my care.
Down on a sluggard streamlet's trail
Wandering in bliss did I thoughtful fare,
The further I followed that watery vale
The greater the joy that constrained me there.
Fortune dealeth as Fortune still,
Sends she solace or sorrow sore;
The man on whom she doth work her will
Of either measure hath more and more.

12

More of bliss was there in that wise
Than I might tell, had I time alway

Tongue of mortal might ne'er suffice
The tithe of that gladness glad to say.
For truly I deemed that Paradise
Were beyond the banks of the stream that day,
And I hoped that the water, by some devise,
Betwixt two joys, as a lakelet, lay.
Beyond the brook, or by glen or glade,
I hoped by the moat to get me o'er,
But the water was deep, I durst not wade,
And longing beset me more and more.

13

More and more, and yet ever more
The yearning to pass that brooklet's band,
For if it were fair on the nearer shore
Far lovelier was the distant land.
Mine eyes they hasted my feet before,
In search of a ford my way they scanned,
But the way had ever more woes in store
The further I wandered beside the strand.
But for never a woe I thought to turn
From a way that so fair a semblance wore.
Then lo! a new note was it mine to learn
That moved my spirit aye more and more.

14

More marvels arose my soul to daze;
I saw, beyond that streamlet fair,
A cliff of crystal, all ablaze,
A glory of royal light it bare.
A child sat beneath those gleaming rays,
A gracious maiden, full debonaire,
Glistening white was her robe always
I knew her well, I had seen her ere!
    As gleaming gold from the finer's fire
    So shone that light on the further shore,
    Mine eyes were fettered with fond desire,
    And gazing, I knew her more and more.

15

Yet more I longed to behold her face
When that gentle form I had found again,
Such glory glad did my soul embrace
As aforetime to sorrow it aye was fain.
Longing to speak with her waxed apace,
But for wonder from words must I needs refrain,
Beholding her in so strange a place
The marvel my spirit might well constrain!
    Then lifted she up her face so fair
    As ivory white, mine eyes before,
    My senses for gladness were scattered there
    I looked, and I wondered more and more!

IV

16

Ah, then my joy was by fear surpassed!
I stood stock-still, I durst not call,
Mine eyes were open, my lips shut fast,
I stood as steady as hawk in hall!
In hope that that vision fair might last,
In dread that, by hap, it should so befall
That she I had chosen should 'scape my cast
Ere yet my speech might her flight forestall.
That guileless maiden, of winsome grace,
So fair, so small, so seemly slight,
In royal array rose before my face,
A precious jewel, with pearls bedight.

17

Pearls that a king had dearly bought
By grace were vouchsafed to my sight that day,
As down the bank her way she sought,
Fresh as a fleur-de-lys in May.
Her amise was glistening white, methought,
Slashed at the sides, and it bare alway
A broidery bright, with pearls inwrought,
Mine eyes ne'er beheld such fair array!
Wide were her sleeves, I wot, and ween,
With a two-fold row of pearls a-light,
Her kirtle shone with the self-same sheen,
With precious pearls was she all bedight!

18

With crown bedight was that gracious maid,
Of pearls and never another stone,
Pure white pearls on each point displayed
And floretted patterns wrought thereon.
No fillet else on her head was laid,
But her hair lay softly her neck upon,
Noble her bearing was, and staid,
Whiter her skin than walrus bone.
As gold bright-burnished her shining hair,
The waves round her shoulders lay loose and light,
And the sheen thereof, it was e'en as fair
As those precious pearls that her robe bedight.

19

Bedight, and broidered was every seam
Of the sleeves, of the sides of each aperture
With pearls, and no other gem, I ween,
All burnished white was that maid's vesture.
But a wondrous pearl, of spotless gleam,
At her midmost breast was set so sure
That the soul of man were set adream,
An he sought to appraise that pearl so pure.
I trow that no tongue of man hath skill
In wisdom's wise to declare aright
How pure, how clear, and how spotless still
Was the precious pearl, on her robe bedight.

20

A precious treasure, all pearl-bedight
Beyond the stream she stept down the strand.
From here to Greece was no heart so light
As mine, when that maid on the brink did stand.
Nor aunt, nor niece, were so glad a sight;
Closer betwixt us I trow, the band;
Speech did she proffer, that being bright,
With such gesture as courtesy doth command.
    Her precious crown she doffed that morn
    And bowed her low, as a maiden might,
    Ah, well is me that I e'er were born
    To speak with that sweet one, with pearls bedight!

V

21

'O, Pearl,' I quoth, 'with pearls bedight,
Art thou the pearl I must sore bemoan?
Lamenting oft, through the weary night
In secret sorrow I wept alone.
Since into the grass didst slip from sight,
Pensive, forlorn, am I moody grown,
But thou, thou dost live in love and light,
In Paradise' peace, where no strife is known!
    What fate hath hither my jewel borne
    And in dole and in danger hath set me e'er?
    For since that we twain were asunder torn
    I have been but a joyless jeweller!'

22

That jewel fair, with gems agleam,
Lifted her face, with eyes of grey,
Set on her crown of pearly beam
And gravely thereafter she spake alway:
'Sir, ye have sure mistook your theme
An ye say that your pearl is gone astray,
'T is safely in coffer kept, I ween,
In this gracious garden that gleameth gay!
    Where one may linger for ever more
    Nor loss nor sorrow draw ever near,
    Methinks thou should'st hold it for treasure store
    An thou wert a gentle jeweller!

23

'But jeweller gentle, an thou shalt lose
Thy joy for a gem that hath seemed thee fair,
Methinks thou the worser way doth choose
And doth weary o'er much for but little care.
That which thou lost, it was but a rose,
That blossomed and faded — so all flowers fare,
By grace of the casket that held it close
To a pearl of price hath it waxen there.
    And thou hast called thy fate a thief
    Altho' of naught hath it robbed thee e'er,
    Thou blamest the cure of thy bitter grief,
    Thou art not a grateful jeweller!'

24

A jewel to me that rebuke so meet,
As pearls her gentle words that day,
'I wis,' quoth I, 'my blissful Sweet
My sore distress thou dost charm away.
Forgiveness of thee I would fain entreat,
I deemed my pearl reft of life alway,
I will hold her fast since once more we meet
And with her in those groves so gay,
I will love my Lord, and His laws so good,
Who hath brought me e'en to such bliss anear,
Were I now with thee beyond this flood
Then were I a joyful jeweller!'

25

'Jeweller,' quoth that gem of sheen,
'Why jest ye men? So mad ye be.
Three words hast thou spoken here, I ween,
All unadviséd, for sooth, the three.
Thou knowest naught of what *one* may mean,
Swifter than wit thy words they flee,
Since thou with thine eyes this form hath seen
My dwelling thou deemest this dale to be!
Again, thou sayest, in this fair land
Wilt abide henceforth, beside me here;
The third, thou thinkest to pass this strand,
That may no joyful jeweller!

VI

26

'I give that jeweller scanty praise
Who believeth that which he seeth with eye;
Discourteous, and meet for all blame his ways
Who deemeth Our Lord would speak a lie.
Leal promise He made your life to raise
Tho' Fortune doomed your flesh to die,
A-wrong do ye read His words always
Who only trust what ye may descry.
  In sooth, 't is a token true of pride
  Which a righteous man doth ill beseem,
  To believe no tale may be true and tried
  Save that which his reason may fitting deem.'

27

'Now arraign thyself, hast thou spoken well
And words such as God would from man receive?
Thou sayest that thou in this burg wilt dwell —
Methinks it behoves thee to first ask leave!
It might chance that refusal thee befell —
Thou canst cross this stream, so dost thou believe,
Thou must seek other counsel, I rede thee well,
First shalt thou thy corse in the cold clay leave!
  Forfeit the ford at Paradise' tree,
  Our forefather guarded full ill the stream,
  Thro' dreary death man his weird must dree
  Ere Christ him meet for the crossing deem.'

28

'Dost think to doom me,' quoth I, 'my Sweet,
To mourn again as I mourned of yore?
To keep what I find would I now entreat
Must I needs forego it, ere speech be o'er?
Why should I thus both miss and meet?
My precious jewel dealeth sorrow sore —
What availeth treasure but to gar man greet
If he needs must lose it in grief once more?
Now what care I if I droop and dwine,
Or if banished afar I weave my theme?
An I have no part in this pearl of mine
A dole enduring, such grief I deem.'

29

'Thou deemest dole shall avail distress,'
Thus spake the maiden, 'why dost thou so?
By loud lament over loss the less
A greater good must man oft forego!
Thou oughtest rather thy lot to bless,
And praise thy God in weal and woe,
Anger availeth not at this stress
Wax not wroth, if thou grief must know.
For tho' thou dost chafe as any deer,
With rush, and wrestle, and angry scream,
Yet thou mayest not come to me anear,
But must needs abide till He fitting deem!

30

'Leave God to judge, let Him aye decree,
From His path He swerveth no foot aside,
Thy moaning no whit shall profit thee
Tho' Sorrow as comrade with thee abide.
Ask thou His blessing right speedily,
Leaving thy strife, and cease to chide,
His pity to prayer may the answer be,
And Mercy her skill may make known this bide.
Comfort He may to thy sorrow deal,
And thus shall thy loss the lighter seem;
For marred, or made, or for woe or weal,
All lieth in Him, as He fitting deem!'

VII 31

Then answered I straight that demoiselle
'I pray that He be not wroth, my Lord,
If e'en as water springs forth from well
I pour forth, raving, a witless word!
My heart with sorrow doth in me swell,
I put me in His miséricorde,
Rebuke me not with words so fell
Tho' I transgress, O thou child adored!
But comfort me kindly, O, gentle maid!
In piteous wise think thou aye on this,
Sorrow and me hast thou comrades made
Who erewhile wast the source of all my bliss!'

32

'Both hast thou been, my bliss, my bane,
Yet much the greater, I ween, my moan,
Since thou hast banished from field and fane
I wist not whither my pearl had gone.
Now that I see her, my grief doth wane,
But when we parted we were at one,
God forbid we should now be twain
Who meet so seldom by stock or stone!
Tho' thou canst rede me such courteous rede
But mortal am I, and my joy I miss,
Christ, Mary, and John, help me at my need,
For they are the ground of all my bliss!

33

'In bliss I see thee wrapt so fair,
And I a man who be Sorrow's mate,
Methinks it doth cause thee little care
That oft I suffer both harm and hate.
But since in thy presence once more I fare
I here beseech thee, nor make debate,
That thou should'st tell me, nor longer spare,
The life thou dost early lead, and late.
For I am well pleaséd that thine estate
Be changed to worship and weal, I wis,
Of my joy, 't is henceforth the entrance gate,
And steadfast groundwork of all my bliss!'

34

'Fair Sir, may bliss thee now betide,'
So spake that maiden of lovesome cheer,
'Thou art welcome here to walk and bide
For now thy speech is to me right dear.
A masterful mood, and o'erweening pride
I tell thee are heartily hated here,
My Lord hath no liking His folk to chide,
Meek be the dwellers His throne anear!
And when in His palace thou shalt appear
Worship Him well, in all humbleness,
For my Lord, the Lamb, loveth aye such cheer,
And He is the ground of all my bliss!

35

'A blissful life, thou sayest, have I,
The manner thereof thou art fain to hear, —
When thy pearl was lost thus grievously
Short was the tale of my childhood's year.
But my Lord, the Lamb, thro' His Godhead high,
He drew me in marriage Himself anear,
In length of days that endureth aye
Hath He crowned me queen, in blissful cheer.
And each Belovéd doth hold in fee
All His heritage — I am wholly His,
His praise, His glory, His worth, they be
The root, and the groundwork of all my bliss!'

VIII

36

‘Blest Maid,’ quoth I, ‘can this be true?
(Be not displeased if amiss I speak).
Art thou the queen of the Heavens blue
Whose honour the whole round world doth seek?
We believe in Mary, from whom Grace grew,
Who bare a Babe, while yet Maiden meek,
Who her coronal fair may aye undo
Save one who may higher honour seek?
Yet for her sweetness beyond compare
We call her the Phoenix of Araby;
That bird, so faultless of form, and fair,
Is like to the Queen of Courtesy!’

37

‘O, Courteous Queen!’ so that blest one said,
Kneeling adown, with hidden face,
‘Matchless Mother, and blissful Maid,
Blessed Beginner of all our grace,’ —
Then she rose again, and stood alway,
And turned to me in that space;
‘Here many seekers their search may stay,
There is never usurper in all this place!
That Empress she ruleth at her behest,
Heaven, Earth, and Hell, ’neath her sway they be,
And none her heritage will contest
For she is the Queen of Courtesy!’

38

'The living God, in His kingdom fair
And royal court, hath this ordering,
All who within those courts repair
Of all the realm are they queen or king.
Yet one taketh not his brother's share,
Each is fain of the other's prospering,
And would wish their crown five times as fair
If so they might greater honour bring.
    But the Mother of Jesus, our Lady sweet,
    She holdeth o'er all of us empire high,
    And all our host do but find it meet
    Since she is the Queen of Courtesy!

39

'By courtesy, so Saint Paul hath said,
Of the Body of Christ are we members all,
As arms and leg, and trunk, and head,
All limbs of this body ye truly call.
So each Christian soul is numberéd
As a member of Him who is Lord of all, —
Now think, were ye not full sore bestead
Did envy betwixt thy limbs befall?
    Tho' thou deck with rings thine arm and hand
    Thy head it doth neither carp nor cry;
    So fare we with joy, a loving band,
    To our King, and our Queen, by courtesy!'

40

Then quoth I, 'Courtesy, I believe
And Charity true, dwell your ranks among,
Yet, tho' I fear such words may grieve,
Methinks what thou sayest must now be wrong;
Too high thy rank, so I now conceive,
For Queen art thou surely over young,
What greater honour might they achieve
Who in this world's strife had battled long,
Or lived in penance their live-long days
Thro' bodily bale their bliss to buy,
What greater honour their meed always
Than thus to be crowned in Courtesy?'

IX

41

'Too lavish that courtesy is, indeed,
If that be truth thou but now didst say,
Two years didst thou wear this mortal weed,
God couldst thou neither please nor pray.
Thou knew'st Paternoster not, nor Creed,
Yet Queen wast thou crowned that self-same day!
I may not trow, so God me speed,
That He hath wrought in so strange a way.
As Countess, Maiden, it seemeth me
Thy name were fair upon Heaven's high roll,
Or e'en as a lady of less degree,
But a Queen, that is sure too high a goal!'

42

'Never a bound shall God's favour know,'
Thus spake to me that maiden bright,
'For all is Truth that He ruleth so,
And He doeth nothing but what is right.
In your missal Matthew doth clearly shew
In the Gospel true of God, His Might,
How the faring of man in the world below
May well be likened to Heaven's delight.
For the Kingdom of Heaven is like to one
Who was fain of his vineyard to take the toll,
For the grapes were e'en to the ripening won
And 't was time of his labour to reach the goal.

43

'The hirelings know well the vintage date,
The lord, he ariseth betimes that day,
He would labourers seek for his fair estate
And some he findeth with small delay.
For the price betwixt them they make debate,
At a penny a day they go their way;
They toil, and they travail, with labour great
They cut, and they carry, and bind alway.
At undern the lord to the market goes,
Yet men stand idle about the place;
"Why stand ye idle?" He asketh those,
"Know ye not of the day the goal and grace?"

44

'"Ere dawn of day were we hither won,"
Thus all together they answer brought,
"Here have we stood since rose the sun
Yet never a man hath our labour sought."
"Go ye to my vineyard every one,"
So spake the lord, in this wise he wrought,
"The hire that be due when the day is run
That will I pay ye, and stint ye naught."
To the vineyard they gat them, and laboured there,
And all day the lord did new men enroll,
And ever anew to the vines they fare
Till well-nigh the day had passed its goal.

45

'At close of the day, at evensong,
It lacked but an hour to sunset tide,
Yet there idle men he saw, and strong,
With grave voice gentle he thus did chide;
"Why stand ye idle the whole day long?"
They quoth, "Our hiring we still abide;"
"Go ye to my vineyard, yeomen young,
And labour, and do what may best betide."
The sun was down, it had waxed full late,
And shadows dim o'er the world did roll,
He bade the labourers their hire await,
For the day, it had fully passed its goal.

X

46

‘The hour of the day doth the master know,
And he calleth his steward, “The time is past,
Give each man the hire that to him I owe, —
And that no reproach upon me be cast,
Range one and all of them in a row,
And give each one as he bargained fast,
Beginning with him who standeth low, —
To each man a penny, the first as last.”
But then the first, they did thus complain,
Saying, “The heat of the day we bore,
These have felt but one hour the stress and strain,
It seemeth to us we should have the more.”

47

‘“More we deserve, it doth seem us so,
Who have borne the heat of the live-long day,
Than these, who have wrought of hours scarce two,
Yet thou makest them equal to us alway!”
The master to answer was not slow,
“Friend, what wrong have I done thee, say?
Take what is thine of the steward, and go,
That which thou bargained for will I pay.
Was not a penny a day thy hire?
Why should’st thou threaten and chafe thus sore?
More than his bargain may none desire,
Why thinkest thou then to ask me more?”

48

'" Is it not fairer, my gift so free,
When I deal with mine own as doth seem me due?
Doth thine eye to evil turn willingly
Because I was righteous, nor trickery knew?
And thus," quoth Christ, "shall it ever be,
The last shall be first, so I tell ye true,
And the first the last, so swift he be,
For the called be many, the chosen few!
Thus the poor in the Kingdom have their share,
Tho' they came but late, and but little bore,
Their labour availed them but little there
But the mercy of God was so much the more."

49

'" More have I of joy and of bliss herein
Of worship high, and of life's fair bloom,
Than all the men in the world might win
Tho' in righteous payment they claim such doom.
'T was well nigh night when I came within.
I won to the vineyard in twilight gloom,
Yet my Lord did His payment with me begin,
Full payment was mine, and that right soon.
Yet to others a longer term is set,
They have toiled and travailed, I ween, of yore,
But naught of their hire have they touched as yet,
And none may they have for a year or more."'

50

Then out I spake, and this word did say,
'I find all reasonless thy tale,
God's law, it is fixed, and set alway,
Else Holy Writ be of small avail.
A verse in the Psalter doth clear away
Doubt from this point, did doubt assail,
"Each one as he merits thou shalt repay,
Thou high King, whose wisdom doth never fail!"
    Now, hath one laboured the whole day thro'
    And thus pass to thy payment that man before,
    Then he winneth the more who the less shall do,
    And ever the longer, the less hath more.'

XI

51

''Twixt more and less in God's Kingdom free,'
That maiden quoth, 'is there full accord,
For there each man, he is paid in fee,
Or much or little be his reward.
Our gentle Chief is not niggardly,
Whether He dealeth soft or hard,
As deluge from dyke His gifts they be,
    Or streams from a deep that may ne'er be stored!
    He winneth full freedom who serveth well
    Him, who wrought us a rescue from sin, I trow,
    No bliss shall be ever from him withheld,
    For the grace of God, it is great enow!

52

'But now thou would'st me here checkmate
In that I my penny have wrongly ta'en,
Thou sayest, in sooth, I came too late
Such reward I may not of right attain.
When knewest thou mortal, or soon, or late,
Who waxed so holy thro' prayer and pain
But that he did in some wise abate
The measure meet of his heavenly gain?
    And aye the oftener as years wax late
    Do they leave the right, and the wrong allow,
    Mercy and Grace needs must steer them straight
    For the grace of God, it is great enow!'

53

But enough of grace have the innocent,
For even so soon as they see the light,
Thro' the waters of Baptism, by consent,
Are they brought to the vineyard in morning bright.
But anon their day is with darkness blent,
They needs must bow them to Death's fell might,
They had wrought no wrong ere hence they went
    His servants the Master doth pay aright.
    They did His behest, in His will did stay,
    Why should He their labour not allow,
    And yield them freely their first day's pay?
    Is the grace of God not great enow?

54

Full well we know that Mankind so great
Was fashioned in perfect bliss to dwell,
But our first father forfeited our estate
For the taste of an apple that pleased him well.
We all were doomed, in that Adam ate,
To die in dole, 't was of joy the knell,
Sithen have we fared, or soon or late,
To dwell for ever in heat of Hell.
But the cure for our sorrow, it came with speed
When red Blood ran on the rood, I trow,
And winsome Water — in our sore need
The grace of God, it waxed great enow!

55

Enough gushed forth from out that well
Blood and Water from Wound so wide,
The Blood hath bought us from bale of Hell,
From the second death doth that stream divide.
The Water is Baptism, sooth to tell,
By the grim glaive freed from His stricken side,
It washeth away our guilt so fell,
'T was Adam had drowned us in Death's dark tide.
'Twixt us and bliss, in this whole world round
Never a barrier standeth now,
All He withdrew in that bitter stound,
The grace of God, it was great enow!

XII

56

Grace enow any man may have
Who sinneth anew, an he but repent,
But with sorrow and sigh he the boon must crave,
And abide the penance with pardon sent.
But reason, methinks, doth ever save
By right abiding, the innocent,
Forsooth God never such judgment gave
That any to doom all guiltless went!
The guilty man, if of contrite heart
Thro' mercy may aye with grace be dight,
But he in whom guile had ne'er part
As innocent, he is saved by right.

57

'Right thus, I know, doth stand the case
Two are the men whom God saveth still;
The righteous man, he shall see His face,
The harmless wight, he shall do His Will.
The Psalmist saith, by God His grace,
"Lord, who shall climb Thy holy hill,
Or dwell within Thy holy place?"
Himself hath he answered, as read ye will —
"The hand that is set to no deed ill,
The heart that abideth pure and white,
His foot shall rest secure and still,
The Innocent, he is saved by right!"

58

‘Certes, the righteous shall attain
That goodly pile, and that temple court,
Who useth not his life in vain,
Nor e’er to deceive his neighbour thought.
The righteous, Solomon sayeth plain,
Shall with welcome fair to the king be brought
His feet He doth in straight paths constrain,
And sheweth him how God’s realm be sought.
As one who saith, “Lo, yon isle so fair!
Thou may’st win it, an thou be valiant wight,
But none without peril may enter there” —
The Innocent, he is saved by right!

59

‘Anent the righteous we read alway
How in the Psalter King David cried;
“Condemn not thy servant, Lord, I pray,
For no man living is justified!”
When to that court thou hast gone thy way
Where all our causes at last be tried,
Thy right, it shall profit no whit that day,
By proof of the words ye have here descried;
But He that on rood a sore death died,
With piercéd hands, whom the spear did smite,
Grant thee to pass when thou art tried
By Innocence, and not by right!

60

'He who aright to read doth know
Let him look in the Book, and be well aware,
How Jesus aforetime walked below
And folk their bairns to His presence bare.
For the healing and health that from Him did flow
To touch the children they prayed Him there,
The disciples were fain they should from Him go,
Through their words of blame many thence did fare.
But Jesus thus sweetly spake His will,
"Suffer the children within My sight,
For such shall the Kingdom of Heaven fill" —
The Innocent is aye safe by right!'

XIII

61

Jesus, He called the meek and mild,
And said His Kingdom no wight might win
Save that he came as doth a child,
Nor otherwise might he enter in.
The harmless, the true, the undefiled,
Without spot or blemish of staining sin,
When they knock at that gate, they be not beguiled,
Swift shall be raised of that latch the pin!
There is the bliss that shall last for aye
That the jeweller thought to find for sure
When he sold his goods and his garments gay
To buy him a pearl all spotless pure.

62

This spotless pearl that was bought so dear,
The jeweller gave for it all his good,
'T is like to the Kingdom of Heaven clear
(So saith the Father of field and flood).
For it is flawless, a shining sphere,
Without end or beginning, and blithe of mood,
And free unto all that righteous were.
Lo! on my breast it long hath stood —
My Lord, the Lamb, He who shed His blood
As token of peace there hath set it sure
I rede thee forsake the world's mad mood,
And buy thee this pearl, so spotless pure!

63

'O spotless Pearl, in pearly sheen,
That bearest,' quoth I, 'the pearl of price!
Whence came thy form, thy gracious mien?
Who wrought thy robe, he was full wise!
Nature such beauty ne'er hath seen!
Pygmalion's skill wore not such guise,
Nor Aristotle, with wit so keen
Thy virtues varied might e'er devise —
Thy colour passeth the lily white,
Thy mien as an angel's, calm, demure,
Tell me what troth, O, Maiden bright,
Hath for token that pearl so spotless pure?'

64

‘My spotless Lamb, who makes all things meet,
With whom my appointed lot shall be,
Chose me as Bride, tho’ all unmeet,
Long since doth seem that festivity!
When I passed from your world, when men sore greet,
He called me to His felicity,
“Come hither to Me, my lemman sweet,
For spot nor blemish is none in thee!”
Thus, dowered with beauty and dignity,
He washed my robe in His blood, for sure,
And crowning me fair in virginity,
He decked me with spotless pearls and pure!’

65

‘O, spotless Bride, who so fair doth flame
In royal array with jewels rife!
Tell me, I pray, of this Lamb the name
Who was fain to take thee to Him as wife?
How above all others did win such fame
As to lead with Him this queenly life,
So many a maiden, free from blame,
For Christ hath lived in toil and strife?
Those dear ones all hast thou set aside?
That marriage bond is for none set sure
Save but for thyself, in thy virgin pride,
Thou peerless maiden, so spotless pure?’

XIV 66

'*Spotless*, indeed,' quoth that gladsome queen,
'Unblemished am I, without a blot,
This to maintain doth grace beseem,
But a *peerless* queen, that said I not!
Brides of the Lamb, in bliss serene,
Twelve times twelve thousand by count, I wot,
Thus in Apocalypse were they seen —
Saint John, he saw, and he hid it not.
On the hill of Sion, that mount so fair,
The Apostle in vision beheld them then,
Arrayed for the wedding feast they fare
To the city of New Jerusalem.

67

'Of Jerusalem will I speak the spell
If thou would'st know what He now shall be,
My Lamb, my Lord, my fair Jewel,
My Joy, my Bliss, my Love, is He!
The prophet Isaiah of Him doth tell,
Of His meekness speaking full piteously,
Whom, guiltless, a traitor to Death did sell;
In Him was no taint of felony!
As a Lamb to the slaughter was He brought,
As Sheep to the shearer they led Him then,
To all that they asked Him He answered naught,
When judged by the Jews in Jerusalem!

68

'In Jerusalem was my True Love slain,
Rent on the Rood by ruffians bold,
Our bale to bear was He ever fain,
He took on Himself our cares so cold.
With blows and spitting His face they stain,
That erst was so comely to behold;
For Sin He counted Himself as vain
Tho' never a sin to His count were told!
Bonds and scourging for us He bare,
And stretched Himself on the rood's rough beam;
Meek as a Lamb did He silent fare
When He suffered for us in Jerusalem.

69

'Jerusalem, Jordan, and Galilee,
There John the Baptist his office wrought,
His words with Isaiah's did well agree
When Jesus anon for his laving sought.
For he spake of Him this prophesie,
"Lo, the Lamb of God, who faileth naught!
But from every sin will set ye free
That ye in this world have witless wrought!"
Never a sin to His count befell,
Yet He to the guilt of all laid claim,
His generations what tongue can tell
Who suffered for us in Jerusalem?

70

'In Jerusalem thus my True Love sweet
Twice as a Lamb was accounted there,
By record of prophet true and meet,
In such meekness and gentleness did He fare!
A third time as Lamb we shall Him greet,
The Apocalypse here doth witness bear,
In the midst of the Throne He hath His seat,
As John the Apostle doth declare.
He opened the Book, and the seals He brake,
The seven seals, He hath broken them,
The boldest heart at that sight must quake
In Hell, in Earth, in Jerusalem!

XV

71

'This Lamb of Jerusalem hath no stain,
His hue, it is white beyond compare,
Blemish, or spot, would ye seek in vain
In that wool so shining, so rich, and rare!
Thus the soul that from sin doth here refrain
For that Lamb is a fitting mate, and fair,
Tho' each day He addeth unto His train
No envy doth one to the other bear.
Yea, we would that each one were waxen five
The more, the gladder, so God me bless,
Our love shall ever in concourse thrive,
Our honour wax greater, and never less!

72

'Less of bliss may we never win
Who bear this pearl upon our breast,
For they who have known no stain of sin
They carry this spotless pearl as crest.
Our bodies are wrapped cold clay within,
And for ruth and rue ye may find no rest,
But knowledge of all is ours herein,
And our Hope is all to one Death addrest.
The Lamb doth rejoice us, our care is past,
With Him do we feed in gladsomeness,
Full measure of honour hath first and last,
And no one's bliss is one whit the less.

73

'Lest fantasy thou should'st deem my tale
Apocalypse doth the truth declare,
"I saw," quoth Saint John, "withouten fail,
The Lamb on Mount Sion stand free and fair.
And with Him were maidens, a goodly tale,
Twelve times twelve thousand, and each one ware
On her forehead the Name that shall aye avail,
To the Lamb, and His Father she witness bare.
A Voice from Heaven I heard o'er all,
Like streams o'erladen that run in stress,
Or as thunder bolts mid the rocks that fall,
That sound, I trow, was never the less!

74

'"Never-the-less tho' it rushed and rang
And struck full loudly upon mine ear,
A newer note those maidens sang
I wis that strain to my heart was dear!
As a harper harpeth the guests among,
So they sang that song, and I needs must hear
How in ringing notes a maiden young
Led the strain which they followed with voices clear;
Yea, e'en as they stood before God's Throne
With the elders grave in righteousness,
And the wondrous Beasts who His lordship own,
The sound of their song was ne'er the less!

75

'"Never a man should be found so wise,
For all the craft that he ever knew,
Of that song the burden to devise
Save they who the track of the Lamb pursue.
For they are redeemed from Earth's alloys,
As first-fruits to God are they wholly due,
And like to the gentle Lamb in guise
Are they joined unto Him in union true.
For never a falsehood, or lying boast
Have touched their tongue for strain or stress,
The bonds that bind that spotless host
To their Spotless Lord shall ne'er be less!"'

76

‘Never-the-less are my thanks,’ quoth I,
‘My Pearl, if a query I still propose,
And be fain still thy knowledge deep to try,
’T was Christ who thee of His household chose.
’Midst dust and ashes my home have I,
And thou art so rich and so royal a rose,
Thou dwellest this blissful bank anigh
Where life’s delights thou shalt never lose.
Oh, simple of heart, and of gracious tongue,
One wish would I fain to thee express,
And tho’ I be churlish all churls among,
Let my prayer avail me, none the less!

XVI

77

‘Never-the-less, I upon thee call,
An thou see it fitting, O, Maiden fair!
Glorious and spotless art thou withal,
Deny me not this piteous prayer!
Have ye no dwelling in castle wall?
No manor wherein ye meet, and fare?
Thou speak’st of Jerusalem’s royal hall
Where David the crown as monarch ware,
Yet by these woods it may never be,
In Judæa that city doth stand, I wot,
Beneath the moon ye from stain are free
And your dwelling should be without a spot!

78

‘Of a spotless throng thou tellest me,
Twelve times twelve thousand, a countless rout,
A city great, so many ye be,
Ye needs must have, without a doubt.
Fair cluster of precious jewels are ye,
’T were ill if any should lie without,
Yet I fare by these banks, and it seemeth me,
No dwelling standeth here about?
I trow thou but lingerest here a space
For the beauty Nature doth here allot,
If thou hast elsewhere an abiding place
I prithee lead me to that glad spot!’

79

‘The spot thou speakest of in Judæa,’
The fragrant fair, in this wise she spake,
‘Is the city to which the Lamb drew near,
Therein did He suffer for all men’s sake.
Of the *old* Jerusalem speak we here
Where Christ the chain of old guilt did break,
But the *New*, which by God’s grace shall appear
The Apostle John for his theme doth take.
Thither the Lamb, without dusky stain,
Hath led His folk, and hath tarried not,
And as that flock without flaw remain,
So His city shall be without a spot —

80

'Certes, we speak of cities twain,
Natheless Jerusalem both are hight,
The meaning for thee doth aye remain,
"The City of God," or "Of Peace the site."
In the first our peace was won again, —
In pain to suffer the Lamb deemed right,
In the other, I ween, Peace doth hold her reign,
With never a check to her ceaseless might.
'T is to that burg that we haste with speed
When our flesh in clay is laid to rot,
There glory and bliss shall aye exceed
For that host that be ever without a spot!'

81

'O, spotless maiden, of gentle grace!'
Thus I besought the winsome flower,
'Bring me, I pray, to that goodly place,
Let me behold thy blissful bower!'
Spake that bright one, who ever beholds God's face,
'Thou mayest not enter within this tower,
But by grace of the Lamb, for a little space,
With the sight of that city He will thee dower.
The outward form of that cloister clean
May'st thou see, but thy strength availeth not
To set thy foot on its streets, I ween,
Save thou be stainless, with ne'er a spot.

XVII

82

'If I this city to thee unveil
Then bend thou towards this streamlet's head
Till thou see'st a hill — I, without fail,
Will follow beyond this river bed.'
I tarried not, but along the vale,
Thro' leafy thickets I swiftly sped,
Till lo, the burg did my sight assail
As it stood on a hill, fair fashionéd!
    Beyond the brook, and away from me,
    Than sunbeam brighter that city shone,
    In Apocalypse may ye its fashion see
    As well deviseth th' Apostle John.

83

As John, the Apostle, beheld with sight
So saw I that city of goodly fame,
Jerusalem, New, all royally dight,
As if from Heaven but now it came.
The burg was of burnished gold so bright,
As glittering glass was it all aflame,
Fair gems beneath it gave forth their light,
And pillars twelve did its groundwork frame.
    The foundations twelve, full rich they were,
    Each slab was wrought of a single stone,
    So well doth picture that city fair
    In Apocalypse, the Apostle John!

84

As John, he hath named them, those stones so fair
After his numbering their names I knew,
Jasper it hight, the first gem there,
On the first foundation 't was plain to view.
It glistened green on the lowest stair;
The second was held by Sapphire blue;
A spotless Chalcedony, and rare,
Gleamed on the third with purest hue.
  The fourth was Emerald, glowing green,
  Sardonyx shone the fifth upon,
  The sixth, a Ruby, as well hath seen
  In Apocalypse the Apostle John.

85

To these John added the Chrysolite,
The seventh gem in foundation stone;
The eighth, the Beryl, so softly bright,
The twin-hued Topaz, the ninth upon.
The tenth, it was Chrysopraseis hight,
The eleventh of Jacinth fair alone,
Then fairest, as blue of Ind its light,
The purple Amethyst gleamed and shone.
  Of gleaming Jasper I saw the wall
  As it stood those pillars twelve upon.
  So well hath he drawn it, I knew it all,
  In Apocalypse, the Apostle John!

86

As John had devisèd I saw the stair,
Broad and steep were its steps, I ween,
The city, it stood above, four square,
In length, breadth, and height was it equal seen.
The streets of gold, as glass they were,
The wall of jasper, with amber sheen,
The walls within, they were decked full fair
With every gem of ray serene.
　And every side of this city good
　Twelve furlongs full, ere its end were won,
　In length, breadth, and height, it equal stood,
　As he saw it measured, the Apostle John!

XVIII　87

As John hath written, I more might see,
Three gates had that city on every side,
Thus twelve I reckoned, in four times three,
And rich plates they decked each portal wide.
Each gate was a pearl of purity,
A perfect pearl, that shall aye abide,
On each one the name, in right degree,
Of Israel's sons might be there descried.
　That is to say, as their birthright bade,
　The eldest was writ the first upon,
　Such light thro' the ways of that city played
　The dwellers they needed nor moon, nor sun!

88

Of sun nor moon had they never need,
For God Himself was their lamp of light,
The Lamb a lantern, their steps to lead,
Thro' Him all that burg beamed fair and bright.
Thro' wall and dwelling my glance might speed,
So clear was it, naught might impede my sight,
The High Throne there ye well might heed,
With royal apparelling all bedight!
As in the words of Saint John I read,
The High God Himself sat upon that Throne,
A river swift from beneath it sped,
'T was brighter than either sun or moon!

89

Sun nor moon had so bright a ray
As that flood in the fulness of its flow,
Swift it surged thro' the city's way
Nor mud nor mire did its waters show.
Church therein was there none alway,
Chapel nor temple, raised arow,
The Lamb is their sacrifice night and day
And God for their temple and priest they know.
Never the gates of that burg they close,
To every lane may a way be won,
But none may enter its fair repose
Who beareth spot, 'neath moon or sun!

90

For there the moon may not wax in might,
Of substance dark, she yet spots doth bear,
And e'en as that burg ne'er knoweth night
What need for the moon on her course to fare, —
And to measure herself with that goodly light
That beyond the river shineth there?
The planets they be in too poor a plight,
And the sun itself may not make compare!
By that water's course stand trees so fair,
Twelve fruits of life do they bear eftsoon,
Twelve times each year they blossom and bear,
And their fruit waxeth new at every moon!

91

No spirit of man 'neath the moon's pale rays
So great a marvel might aye endure,
As when on that burg I fixed my gaze,
So wondrous its fashion, and fair allure!
I stood as still as quail a-daze
For wonder before that vision pure,
The glamour so ravished me with amaze
Nor rest, nor travail, I felt for sure!
This I dare say in good conscience still,
Had man in the body received that boon
Tho' all clerks for his care had spent their skill
His life had been forfeit beneath the moon!

XIX

92

E'en as when the moon at her full doth rise
Ere yet hath been lost the gleam of day,
So, sudden, I saw in a wondrous wise
A fair procession that took its way.
This noble city, of rich emprise,
With never summons, with no delay,
Was full of virgins in self-same guise
As my sweet one, in crown of pearly ray.
And each was in self-same fashion crowned,
Bedecked with pearls, in weeds of white,
On each one's breast I saw it bound,
That goodly pearl of fair delight!

93

They stepped all together in great delight
On the golden ways, by that living stream;
Hundred thousands, I ween, their might,
And their robes did all of one fashion seem.
Who was gladdest, none might discern aright —
With seven horns of red golden beam
The Lamb before them passed — all white
His robes, like precious pearls their gleam.
Toward the Throne on their way they pass,
Tho' many they were, they moved aright,
And thronged not, but meekly as maids at mass
They fared in order, with great delight!

94

Delight the more at His coming grew
Too great for tongue of man to tell,
The elders all when He nearer drew
Prostrate before the Throne they fell.
Legions of angels the summons knew,
Incense they scattered, of sweetest smell,
Glory and gladness were raised anew,
And joyous songs for that Jewel well.
The strain might smite thro' Earth to Hell
That Virtues, and Powers, in Heaven recite;
To love the Lamb, and His praise to tell,
Therefrom did I win a great delight!

95

Delight and wonder within me fought
When I fain would picture that Lamb so dear,
Best was He, blithest, most hardly sought,
That ever in words I think to hear.
His vesture of purest white was wrought,
Himself so gentle, His glance so clear;
But a bleeding Wound, and wide, methought,
Cleft thro' His Side, His Heart anear.
Forth from that Wound the Blood flowed fast,
Alas, I thought who did this despite?
His breast of Hell-fires should feel the blast
Ere that in such doing he found delight!

96

The Lamb's delight none might doubt, I ween,
Altho' He were hurt, and wounded sore,
In His countenance naught thereof was seen
Of glorious gladness the mien He wore.
I looked upon that host's fair sheen
Dowered with life for evermore,
And lo, I saw there my little queen,
Who, methought, stood e'en on that streamlet's shore.
    Ah, Christ! what gladness and mirth she made
    Among her companions she shone so white,
    The sight, it urged me the stream to wade
    For love, and longing, and great delight!

XX

97

Delight it smote me thro' ear and eye,
My mortal mind was in madness cast,
When I saw my fair one, I would be nigh
Tho' beyond the stream she were held full fast.
No power was there that I might descry
To check me, and hold, ere the stream be past,
And if none withheld me that flood to try
I would swim the rest, if I drowned at last!
    But from that counsel I soon was caught
    E'en as the water I would assay,
    To another mood was I swiftly brought,
    This were not fitting my Prince's pay!

98

It had pleased Him not myself to fling
By madness spurred, o'er that wondrous mere,
Tho' in rushing race I would make my spring
E'en as I came to that bank anear.
My steps to a halt I needs must bring —
My haste had shattered my vision sheer,
Where my form in grief to the earth did cling,
There I awoke, in that arbour dear!
There, where my pearl to ground had strayed,
I arose, and I fell, in great dismay,
And sighing sore, to myself I said,
'Now all shall be to that Prince's pay!'

99

Full ill it pleased me to be out cast
So suddenly, from that realm so fair,
From that blissful vision, so soon o'erpast —
For longing I fell a-swooning there!
And with rueful voice made lament full fast.
'O, Pearl!' quoth I, 'so rich and rare,
Fair was that vision I saw at last,
And dear those tidings thou didst declare:
And if it be true of very sooth
That thou farest thus, in garland gay,
'T is well with me in this house of ruth,
Since thou art fair to that Prince's pay!'

100

Had I to that Prince's pleasure bent,
And craved no more than to me was given,
And held me there with true intent
As my Pearl besought, who so fair hath thriven,
Then, drawn to God's presence, by His consent,
The veil of His mysteries had been riven;
But man with his bliss is ne'er content,
But asketh more than may well be given!
Therefore my joy was the sooner crost,
I was thrust from the realm of endless day,
Christ! They in madness their toil have lost
Who proffer thee aught save what be thy pay!

101

To please that Prince is a task full light
For the Christian soul, — to His peace they wend —
For I have found Him by day and night,
A God, a Lord, and a faithful Friend.
On a hill did this lot upon me light
When grief for my pearl I might not amend,
In the blessing of Christ, my gem so white
To God's good keeping I now commend.
Christ, who in form of Bread and Wine,
The priest shews forth to us day by day,
Keep us as household folk of Thine,
As precious pearls for our Prince's pay!
Amen, Amen.

The Vision of Piers the Plowman

Text A

The Vision of Piers the Plowman

Text A

PROLOGUE

All in a summer season, whenas the sun shone fair,
I clad me in a cere-cloth, e'en as a sheep I were,
In habit of a Hermit, whose works unholy be,
Wide in the world I wandered, its wonders all to see:
But all on a May morning, on Malvern's hills so high,
A marvel fair befell me, methought of Faërie.
Weary was I of wandering, and fain to rest that tide,
I sat me 'neath a broad bank that ran a burn beside,
And as I, leaning, lay there, and watched the water fleet
I slid into a slumber, the sound, it was so sweet.
And there a Dream hath met me, a marvel strange and fair,
I deemed me in a desert, but yet I knew not where.
As to the East I turned me, there, where the sun stood high,
I saw a tower on hill-top, well builded verily.
A deep dale lay beneath it, therein a dungeon-hold,
And dark and deep that ditch was, and dreadful to behold.
But, filled with folk, a fair field betwixt the two was seen,
Yea, folk of every fashion, rich men and poor, I ween.
They worked, and eke they wandered, so runs the world alway;

Some set them to the plough-share, and seldom thought of
play,
In harrowing and sowing they gain, laboriously,
What many of these wasters destroy in gluttony.
And some, they proudly preen them, in fair apparel all,
In clothing quaint and cunning disguise themselves withal.
To prayer, I trow, and penance, many their mind they give
And for God's Love, a hard life on earth they choose to live,
That Heaven's bliss, hereafter, to them be fully told —
As Anchorites and Hermits, they here their cells do hold,
And care not thro' the country at will to come and go
Their livelihood, as likes them, with fleshly joys to know.
And some had chaffering chosen, the better to achieve,
So to our sight it seemeth, more profit such receive.
And some make mirth as minstrels, and with their games and
glee
They get them gold, yet guiltless, I trow, such men shall be.
But Jesters all, and Jongleurs, the sons of Judas they
By fantasies they flourish, and fools they make alway.
With wit at will they 're dowered, to work if so they please —
Altho' for proof I stay not, yet Paul, he preached of these,
'*Qui turpiloquium loquitur* the Devil serves at ease!'
And Beggars I beheld there, how fast afoot they fare,
Till bags alike, and bellies, brimful of food they bear,
Thus, for their food, make feigning, and at their ale they
fight;
In gluttony, God knoweth, they get to bed at night,

In ribaldry arising — but robber-knaves are they,
And sleep and sloth for ever pursue them on their way.
Pilgrims I saw, and Palmers, a vow in common speak
Saint James of Compostella and Saints at Rome to seek;
Forth on their way they gat them, with many a wondrous tale,
And leave to lie thereafter, till life and breath shall fail!
Yea, and a horde of Hermits, with hookéd staff in hand
To Walsingham they wandered with wenches in a band;
Long lusty lubbers were they, and loath to toil withal,
But fain in capes to clothe them that men them 'Brother' call.
And some, they made them Hermits, to take their ease the more;
And Friars too, I found there, all of the Orders four,
All preaching to the people, for profit and for food,
With glozing of the Gospel, e'en as it seemed them good.
For, covetous of Capes, they construe their message ill,
And many of these masters may clothe them at their will;
The merchandise and money full oft together thrive
Since Charity turned trader, and chief the lords to shrive,
The marvels have been many, tho' but few years be told!
Save Holy Church bethink her, the reins to better hold
Too fast, I trow, it mounteth, most mischief upon mold!
A Pardoner was preaching, as he a priest should be,
A Bull he brought to showing, with Bishop's seals to see,
And said he might assoil them, himself, yea, here and now,
From Falseness, and from Fasting, and sin of broken vow.

Right well the lewd men liked him, believed him to the full,
And came and knelt before him, and each one kissed the Bull,
Bare from the brief a buffet that bleared their eyes, I trow,
And thus the Bull hath brought him brooches and rings enow.
That gluttony be gainer, methinks our gold we give,
On vagabonds we waste it, that they loose lives may live.
Nay, were the Bishop blessèd, and worth his ears alway
He would not be so daring, and thus his folk betray.
Not that I deem the Bishop alone the blame should bear,
For parish priest and preacher, the silver 'twixt them share,
That were the poor man's portion, save that those twain were
there!
Both parish priest and parson to Bishop make their cry
That, since the Pest, their parish hath been in poverty,
And crave for leave and licence in London town to dwell
For Simony to sing there, since silver pleaseth well!
There hove in sight a hundred, in hoods of silken sheen,
Serjeants they were by seeming, who, at the bar, I ween,
For pence will make their pleading, for pounds expound the
law
For love of God and Goodness, their lips, they speak no saw!
'T were easier to measure the mist on Malvern's hill
Than win a word of counsel till they be paid their fill!
Both Bachelor, and Bishop, versed in divinity,
Clerks of account they make them, to serve the King for fee.
Archdeacons, yea, and deacons, whose office high it is
To preach unto the people, and feed the poor, I wis,

They now be fled to London, their bishops let them go,
Clerks of the King's Bench are they, to work their country woe.
The Baron, and the Burgess, and Bondmen too, as well,
I saw in that assembly, as I'll hereafter tell;
And Bakers too, and Butchers, and Brewsters saw I there,
And Weavers, some of woollen, and some of linen fair.
The Tailors, and the Tanners, and Fullers too, I saw,
The Masons, and the Miners, of crafts, yea, many more.
The Ditchers, and the Delvers, idlers, I trow the same
The live-long day they loiter, with '*Dieu vous save, Good Dame!*'
Cooks and their knaves were crying, 'Hot pies, hot pies! Good swine
And geese, I trow, be ready, go dine, good-man, go dine!'
And Taverners that same tale were telling low and high
'Here be good wine of Osay, and wine of Gascony,
Of Rhine and eke of Rochelle, that with the roast be told —'
All this I saw while sleeping, and more, by sevenfold!

PASSUS I

Now what this mountain meaneth, and this dark dale below,
This fair field all with folk filled, I think me now to show.
Lovesome of mien, a Lady in linen clothed full fair
Came from the cliff above me, and called upon me there,
And said: 'Son, art thou sleeping? The folk, say dost thou see,
How in a maze they wander, and therewith busy be?

The most part of the people who pass on earth to-day
Care but for this world's worship, no better hope have they,
Nor of another Heaven do they take heed alway!'
Her face, with fear it filled me, tho' fair it was, I ween,
'*Merci, ma Dame*,' I quoth then, 'now say, what may this mean?'
'This Tower on the hill-top, Truth dwells therein alway
And 't is His Will that men work e'en as His Word doth say,
"Father of Faith" His title, He formed ye, one and all,
With form and face, and five Wits He gave to ye withal.
To worship Him and serve Him, while here below ye live,
And eke, for each one's service, command to Earth did give
To yield ye wool and linen, and livelihood at need,
In measureable manner, that ye may better speed;
In courtesy commanding for common use things three,
Their names, I trow, be needful, I speak them here to thee —
By rule and eke by reason their names shall now be told,
The first need, that is Clothing, to shield ye from the cold;
The next be Meat at meal-time, to keep ye from misease,
And Drink when ye be thirsty, as Reason too shall please,
Lest, when thou would'st be working the worse thereof ye be —
Remember in his life-days Lot was of drink too free,
And dealt with his two daughters as pleased the Devil well,
Since he in Drink delighted, to Devil's deeds he fell,
For Lust laid hold upon him, and with them both he lay —
That wicked deed, he blamed it upon the wine alway.

To dread the drink delicious, is better, so I ween,
There 's Medicine in Measure, tho' appetite be keen.
Not all the Soul sustaineth that serves the Body's need,
Nor is your Body nourished on what the Soul doth feed.
Believe thou not the Body, by Liar taught alway
Whose words be of the Devil would thee fain betray,
The Fiend and Flesh together, in league the twain they be
To bring the Soul to shaming, e'en as thine heart may see;
And that thou should'st be wary I show it now to thee!'
'*Ah, Madame, merci!*' quoth I, 'thy words for good I hold
But tell me of this money that men hold fast on mold,
To whom pertains this treasure, the silver, and the gold?'
'Go to the Gospel,' quoth she, 'where God Himself doth speak
When people with a penny His counsel fain would seek
If they should render tribute to Cæsar as their lord, —
He bade them read, and tell Him of whom it spake, the word,
And whose should be the image that that same coin did show —
They answered: "It is Cæsar, as every man may know!"
(*Reddite ergo que sunt Cesaris Cesari, et que sunt Dei, Deo*)
And Christ made answer: "Render to Cæsar what is his
And what is God's, to God give, else ye do ill, I wis."
And Reason good and rightful, I trow, should rule us all,
And Mother-wit be warden upon our wealth withal,
And guardian of our treasure, to use as best for ye
For Wit and Thrift together good comrades shall they be!'
Then did I straitly pray her, yea, in God's Name, that she

That dungeon in the deep dale, that dreadful is to see,
Its name, and eke its meaning, should tell them now to me!
'It is,' she quoth, 'the Castle of Care, who comes therein
May curse the day his body or soul to life did win,
Therein a wight he dwelleth, and Wrong his name shall be,
The father of all Falsehood, its source and sire is he.
Adam and Eve he tempted, and led them on to ill,
To Cain he gave the counsel he should his brother kill.
And with the Jewish silver Judas did he beguile
On elder-tree he hanged him within a little while,
And Love he ever letteth, and lieth without ruth
To all who trust in treasure, wherein shall be no truth.'
Then in my heart waxed wonder, who might this Woman be
Who spake such words of wisdom from Holy Writ to me?
In God's Name I adjured her, ere she from hence should go
To say who she was surely who might such Wisdom show.
'Now Holy Church, my Name is, did'st know me well, methought,
'T was I who first received thee, the Faith to thee who taught,
To me thou gavest pledges, to hold my laws full fast
And loyally to love me, while that thy life should last.'
Then on my knees I kneeléd, and, fain her grace to win,
I piteously besought her to pray for this, my sin,
And eke to teach me kindly the Faith of Christ to hold
And work His Will henceforward who made me man on mold.
'Teach not of earthly Treasure, but tell this same to me
How I may save my soul here, thou, who a saint shalt be!'

'When tried shall be all treasure, the best, it shall be Truth,
For love of God I tell ye, I deem it shall be sooth,
It is a precious treasure, as God Himself shall be,
Whoso of tongue is truthful, and from all falsehood free,
And ever worketh truly, and ill to none doth do,
Is counted of the Gospel on high, and eke below,
He to Our Lord is likened, e'en as Saint Luke doth show.
In sooth, the clerks who know it the same should ever teach
And Christian, or non-Christian they claim to, all and each!
Both Kings and Knights should keep them by Reason's rule, I ween,
And aye in rightful progress about the realm be seen,
That they may take transgressors, in bonds to set them fast
Till Truth shall be triumphant, and the transgression past.
For in his days, King David, he dubbed full many a knight,
And on their sword he sware them to follow Truth and Right;
That is the proud profession that doth to knights pertain
And not from flesh on Friday for five-score years abstain!
But ever hold with such folk as Truth would make prevail
Nor leave them for Love's waning, or if the silver fail!
For he who passeth such point Apostate is he hight —
And Christ, the King of all Kings, I trow, made many a knight!
Cherub, I ween, and Seraph, the orders four that be,
And might and mastery gave them by this, His Majesty,
And o'er His host Archangels, I trow, he made them there
Thro' Trinity hath taught them to know the Truth so fair,

And to obey His bidding — nor other did He tell.
Lucifer, and his legions, in Heaven they learnt it well,
After Our Lord no Angel so fair as he, until
Boastful, he brake His bidding for pride, and sheer self-will.
Then fell he with his fellows, as Fiends they now be cast
From Heaven to Hell's deep dungeon, where they be prisoned fast.
Some in the air be holden, on earth some, some in Hell,
But Lucifer the lowest of all, I trow, he fell.
Pride had he beyond measure, and now hath endless pain,
And all who be wrongdoers shall wend that way again,
And when their death-day cometh shall dwell in his domain.
But they whose works be even as Holy Writ doth tell,
Whose end be as I erst said, of one who doeth well,
Sure shall they be and certain their souls in Heaven be found,
Where Triune Truth yet reigneth, by Truth shall they be crowned.
I certify and say here, by Holy Writ's behest,
When tried shall be all treasure Truth shall be proved the best.
Teach this to the unlearnéd, the lettered well should know
Truth is the greatest treasure that Earth to man may show.'
Quoth I: 'Ye needs must teach me, for knowledge none have I,
By what craft of my Body I may the Truth descry?'
Quoth she: 'Art daft and doting, and dull thy wit shall be
For 't is a natural knowledge, thine heart may teach it thee,
To love the Dear Lord better than thou thyself dost love,
To shun sins that be mortal tho' Death thy portion prove,

I trow this be Truth's teaching, who knows a better lore
Then suffer him to say so, and teach it evermore!
For thus God's Word doth teach us, see thou perform the task,
Love is of all things dearest that God from man doth ask.
The plant of Peace springs from it, thine harp to this tune string,
When thou at meat art merry, and men shall bid thee sing,
For as thine heart doth prompt thee, so shall thy measure ring.
That cometh from the Father who formed us, one and all,
With Love He looked upon us, and sent His Son withal,
To die for us in Meekness, our misdeeds to amend,
And yet no woe He wished them who wrought Him such an end!
But with His Mouth, so meekly, Mercy for them besought,
And pity on the people who pain on Him had brought.
Here mayst thou find ensample, by God Himself may'st see
How He was Meek, tho' Mighty, and mercy granted free
To those His Heart who piercéd, and hanged Him high on Tree.
Therefore the rich I rede them, pity the poor man's need,
And e'en as ye be mighty let mercy rule your deed,
(*Eadem mensura qua mensi fueritis remercietur vobis*).
The measure ye have meted, or good or ill it be,
When hence ye shall have passéd, that shall be paid to ye.
Tho' ye of tongue be truthful, and true in deed do keep,
And hold ye chaste as children who in the church do weep,
Save that your life be loyal, and to the poor ye bear

True love, your goods, God-given, with them ye freely share,
Then have ye no more merit thro' Mass or prayer won
Than Maid who keeps her Virgin when she is wooed by none.
For James, the gentle, wrote it, and in his book 't is seen
Faith without Works is feeble, and aye hath worthless been,
'T is dead as any door-nail, save that it proven be
By deeds, and so I tell ye that even Chastity
An Charity be lacking, is as a lamp unlit; —
Chaste Chaplains there be many, who have small love, I wit,
No men than they be harder, when they advancement win
Unkind they be to Christians, unkind unto their kin,
What they should give, they eat it, and cry for more always,
Such Chastity, all loveless, in Hell were worthy praise!
The Curates who should keep them in body chaste and clean,
With care they be encumbered, and come not forth, I ween,
For Avarice hath bound them within its bonds so fell,
That is not Truth of Trinity, but treachery of Hell!
And thus the layman learneth in giving to be slow
Yet these same words be written in Gospel, as ye know,
"Give, and it shall be given for I deal to ye all
Your Grace, and your Good-fortune, and goods that to ye fall,
And therefore should ye love Me for these My gifts withal."
And this Love's lock that opened shall let my Grace flow free.
The careful shall ye comfort, oppressed by sin they be,
Love is the gift most precious Our Lord from us doth play
And eke the gate that leadeth to Heaven's bliss straightway.
I say, as erst I said here, by Holy Writ's behest,

When tried shall be all treasure, then Truth shall be the best,
And I have truly told thee what this same Truth shall be,
I may no longer linger, Our Lord watch over thee!'

PASSUS II

Yet on my knees I kneeléd, and cried to Her for aid,
And said, 'Ah, Madame, Mercy! For love of Mary Maid,
Who bare that Bairn so blissful, who bought us on the Rood,
The False, I fain would know it, teach me that craft so good!'
Quoth she, 'Look on your left-hand, and see where he doth stand,
Who is Deceit, and Falsehood, behold him and his band!'
I looked upon the left-hand, e'en as the Lady bade,
Ware was I of a Woman, most wondrously arrayed,
Her robes with fur were bordered, richer no man might see,
She with a crown was crownéd, befitting royalty,
On each hand her five fingers were decked with rings arow,
Set with as precious jewels as prince's hand might show.
She rode arrayed in scarlet, be-ribboned all with gold,
I trow no queen were fairer who liveth upon mold!
Quoth I: 'Who is this Woman attired thus wondrously?'
Quoth she: ''T is Meed, the Maiden, who oft works harm to me,
My teaching oft she blameth to lords of counsel high,
Within the Pope's own palace she comes and goes as I,
She should not there be suffered, for Wrong, he was her sire,
From Wrong she waxed, on many to wreak ill-fortune dire,

I ought to rank the higher, since I was better born —
This Maiden Meed, and Falsehood, they wed to-morrow morn,
For Flattery, with Fair-speech, the twain together brought
And Guile, he did persuade her to do as he besought,
And 't is by Liar's leading, I trow, the match is wrought.
To-morrow is the marriage, in sooth I say to thee,
And there thou well may'st know them, who all of them shall be
Belonging to that lordship, or great they be, or small,
There thou can'st see and know them, — but keep thee from them all
If thou with Truth hereafter art fain in bliss to dwell,
Learn thou His Law, so loyal, and, learning, teach it well.
I may no longer linger, Our Lord watch over thee,
Strive thou to be a good man, from greed to keep thee free.'
Whenas that Lady left me I looked, and did behold
Rich retinue and royal, who did with Falsehood hold;
All bidden to the bridal, on both sides did they fare,
Sir Simony was sent for to seal the charters there
That Flattery, or Falsehood, did hold by fee, I trow,
Wherewith he Meed, the Maiden, in marriage would endow.
But house nor hall might harbour the hosts that came that day
For all the fields and meadows so full of folk were they;
Then midst them, on a mountain, e'en at mid-morrow's tide,
They reared a proud pavilion, around, on every side,

Ten thousand tents they pitched there, to lodge them at that same,
The knights of every country, and all who thither came,
For summoners, for jurors, those who would buy or sell,
The layman, and the learnéd, the village folk as well,
And for the flattering Friars, of the four Orders all
That well it should be witnessed what there was writ withal,
And how, in marriage dowered the Maiden Meed should be
When she should wed with Falsehood, how men should fix the fee,
Forth Flattery he led her, to Falsehood took her there,
In forward fast with Falsehood she should be bounden fair
Obedient, and ready his bidding to fulfil,
In bed and board, at all time, serving with ready skill,
(Sir Simony, he said it) obeying swift his will.
Now Simony and Civil, together forth they stand,
The deed, drawn up by Falsehood unfolded in their hand,
And thus they made beginning, the twain, and loud did cry:
'Now be it known to all men who dwell on Earth, that I
Who Flattery be, pledge Falsehood unto the Maiden Meed
Who here in pride be present, in riches, or in need,
I Envy's Earldom give them, for evermore to hold,
Therewith shall all its Lordship in length and breadth be told,
To Covetousness' Kingdom, crownéd the twain shall be,
False Avarice their Dower, and Isles of Usury.
Of Gluttony, and great oaths, I give them here the fee,
With all delights of Lustfulness, the Devil's slaves to be.

Seigneurs of Sloth endow them, the same to have and hold,
The Seigneurie hereafter unto their heirs be told.
With Purgatory's portion, conjoined with pains of Hell,
For this they, at the year's end, I trow, shall payment tell,
Yielding their souls to Satan, by him be sent to pain,
With Wrong to make their dwelling, while God in Heaven doth reign.'
For witness of this forward Wrong was the first to go,
And Piers the Pardoner followed, a Pauline's Doctor, too,
Then Bette the Beadle witnessed, of Buckinghamshire he,
Randolf the reeve of Rutland, with many more there be,
Of Taborers, of Tumblers, of Tapsters, too, I trow,
And Mond the Miller saw I, and other men enow.
By year of Devil dated, and sealed the deed must be,
Sir Simony beholding, and signed by Notary.
Theology waxed wrathful when this came to his ear,
In anger quoth to Civil, 'Now woe betide thee here,
To bring about such wedding, and thus to anger Truth,
Ere it were wrought, this marriage, I trow thou should'st have ruth,
For Meed is richly dowered, a wealthy maiden she,
God grant that at Truth's bidding she shall assignéd be,
And thou to Guile dost give her, God give thee sorrow now,
Not so the text is written, Truth wots it well, I trow, —
"*Dignus est operarius mercede sua* —"
Worthy of Meed the workman, so doth it run, the saw,
Thou weddest Meed to Falsehood, now fie upon thy law!

The Lechers and the Liars dost love, assuredly
Is Holy Church now shamēd by thee and Simony,
But both, I trow, shall rue it, by God who made us all
Whenas the year's end cometh, then shall the reckoning fall!
Full sore ye vex the people, these notaries, and ye,
For well ye know, ye Liars, save your Wit faileth ye,
That Falsehood is a traitor, who aye doth fail in deed,
For he was born a bastard, and of the Devil's seed;
But Meed is richly dowered, a Maid of high degree,
To kiss the King entitled, his cousin sure is she.
I rede thee work with Wisdom, and let Wit guidance show,
And lead the Maid to London, where men the law shall know;
If Loyalty permit it, that they together be,
And Justice shall adjudge her to wed with Falsity.
Beware of this same wedding, for Truth be wise enow,
His Counsellor is Conscience, who knows all men, I trow,
And if default he findeth, that ye with Falsehood hold,
Your Souls shall pay sore forfeit when the last lot is told.'
Civil thereto assented, but Simony delayed
Until his saws and sealing with silver should be paid.
Then Flattery from his treasure florins enow he told,
Bade Guile go-to, and swiftly distribute well the gold,
The notaries to give it, that none should lacking be,
False witnesses to furnish with florins for their fee
That Meed by him be mastered, that she should do his will,
Where Falsity ye find it there Faith it faileth still.

Then when the gold was given great thanks were proffered
there
To Flattery and Falsehood for these their gifts so fair;
And many came who Falsehood would comfort in his woe,
And on the Hallows sware it, 'Rest shall we never know
Till Meed with thee be wedded, thro' knowledge of us all,
For we the Maid have mastered by our fair words withal,
So that she now doth grant us, of right goodwill, that she
To London will betake her to learn, if lawfully,
Ye twain shall be adjudgéd, in wedlock joined to be.'
Then fain thereof was Falsehood and Flattery that tide
And swift all men they summoned throughout the country-
side,
And bade burgess and sheriff array them now with speed
To Westminster to wend them, as witness of this deed.
They clamoured loud for horses, to bear them on their way,
The foals that Flattery led forth best of their kind were they;
Set Meed upon a Sheriff, all newly shod, I wot,
Falsehood, on an Assizor, who did right gently trot,
For 'gainst the faith doth Falsehood assizors now defile
By greed of gain encumbered they strive 'gainst Truth the
while,
And thus, the Faith defiling, defame it as they please —
Falsehood, to lordship waxen, he liveth at his ease.
And Flattery rode on Fairspeech, attired in fashion fair,
For Fairspeech that is faithless, he doth with Falsehood pair.
Assizors thus be summoned the false to serve, I trow,

By Flattery and Fairspeech deceiving folk enow.
No horse the Notaries found there, and sore annoyed were they,
That Simony and Civil on foot must take their way.
Then Civil spake in anger, and sware upon the Rood
That Summoners be saddled, to do them service good.
'Apparel here Provisors, in palfrey's wise, to wit,
And on their back full safely Sir Simony shall sit;
Dight all the Deans and Sub-deans, as steeds at my behest,
For they shall bear the Bishops, and bring them well to rest;
And Pauline's folk, for laying plaint in Consistory,
They now must do my service who Civil named shall be.
Our commissary yoke him, that he may draw our cart
To bear our load of victuals, the fornicator's part!
Make a long cart of Liar, that others all he lead,
The Liars and Impostors, who fare afoot with speed.'
Now Flattery and Falsehood together forth they fare,
Meed, in the midst she rideth, their mesnie follow fair,
Methinks the time would fail me ere yet the tale was told
Of all those men, so many were they who live on mold!
But Guile, he was forerunner, to guide them on their way. —
Soothness, he well beheld them, and little did he say,
But pricked forth on his palfrey, and passed them, without fail,
And, coming to the King's court, to Conscience told his tale.
Conscience, he sought the King then, bare him the tidings true,

'By Christ,' the King quoth swiftly, 'an I might catch the
crew
Or Flattery, or Falsehood, or those who do his will,
I 'ld venge me on these wretches, who work me so much ill;
And by the neck I 'ld hang them, and all who be them fain
No man on mold, by my will, the least thing shall maintain
But as the law hold rightful — Let fall upon them all,
The Constables command now to come at the first call,
And to attach the traitors for treasures proffered there,
Fast shall ye fetter Falsehood, an gifts he giveth fair;
Guile's head, I bid ye hew off, let him no further go,
And bring me Meed the maiden despite the wrath they show.
To Simony and Civil a warning bring from me
Lest Holy Church for ever by them should harméd be.
If Liar, ye may catch him, see that ye do not spare
But in the stocks now set him, nor hearken to his prayer,
I bid thee well await them, let none escape ye there.'
Now Dread, he at the door stood, the doom right well he heard,
And swift he sped, to Falsehood he bare the warning word,
And bade him and his comrades full fast to flee that day.
Then to the Friars, Falsehood, for fear, he made his way;
And Guile, aghast, would fly thence, in terror lest he died,
But that he met with merchants, who forced him to abide,
And, in their shops, besought him their wares for them to sell
Apparelled as apprentice, to serve the people well.
And lightly Liar leapt thence, and gat him on his way,
Ever thro' bye-lanes lurking, and here and there he lay,

But nowhere was he welcome, for these, his tales, each one
Was fain from thence to hunt him, and bid him to begone.
The Pardoners, in pity, to house they bade him there,
And well they washed and cleansed him, wound him in clothes full fair
And sent him forth on Sunday to church, with seals well found,
Pardons for pence he gave there, and gathered many a pound.
Letters the Leeches wrote him, when they these tidings knew
And proffered him a dwelling, would he their potions brew.
And Spicers, they spake with him, prayed him to guard their spice,
For gums, right well he knew them, and many a fair device.
And Messengers, and Minstrels, they met with him that tide,
Six months and weeks eleven with them must he abide;
But with fair speech, the Friars, they fetched him thence one day
Lest he be known by strangers, as Friar with them to stay;
Yet hath he leave to run forth, as it shall please him well,
To them he aye is welcome, with them he oft doth dwell!
And thus for fear they fled all, in corners fain would hide,
And, saving Meed the maiden, no man durst there abide.
Yet truth to tell she trembled, for very fear she shook,
Wrung her hands, weeping sorely, when men her captive took.

PASSUS III

Now ta'en is Meed, the maiden, she of them all alone
By Beadles, and by Bailiffs, and brought before the throne.

The King, a clerk he called there, his name I know it not,
To take in charge the maiden, and still her fears, I wot.
'For I, myself, will try her with questions, and will hear
Who is the man in this world who is to her most dear,
If by my wit she worketh and followeth my will
Her guilt I will forgive her, God be my Helper still!'
Full courteously, the clerk then, e'en as the King he bade,
He took Meed by the middle, to hall he led the maid,
And there they made, to please her, much mirth and minstrelsy,
Honoured is she by all men at Westminster who be.
With joyous mien and gentle the justices that day
Forth to the bower they hurried wherein the maiden lay
And comforted her kindly, bade her be of good cheer,
Saying: 'Meed, cease thy mourning, no sorrow waits thee here!
Thy way, we well will shape it, and so the King advise,
"For all the craft that Conscience, I trow, may yet devise,"
That at thy will thou dealest with might and mastery,
With King, and Court, and Commons, as shall seem best to thee.'
Then, mildly, Meed the maiden, gave thanks unto them all
For their great goodness freely she dealt to them withal
Cups of pure gold, and silver, and pieces broad, I trow,
And ruby rings, and riches, she rained on them enow,
The least man of her mesnie a gold piece did receive —
Therewith, I trow, the lordings from Meed they took their leave.

With that, her care to comfort, the clerks, they hasten then
'Now to be blithe we bid thee, for we be thine own men,
To work thy will we 're ready while that our life endure.'
She courteously did promise, and did them all assure,
That she would loyally love them, and lords would make
them all,
At Court, and in Consistory that she their names would call:
'Nor ignorance shall hinder the simplest man I love
But he shall win advancement — My skill I shall approve
Where cunning clerks no counsel can find whereby to move!'
Therewith came a Confessor, a Friar's cape he ware,
And unto Meed, the maiden, he meekly bowed him there,
And said to her full softly, as she would shriven be:
'Tho' learnéd men, and laymen, I trow, had lain with thee,
And Falsehood been thy fellow for fifteen winters cold
A load of wheat sufficeth, thy pardon shall be told;
And I will be thy pandar, and do thine errand well
Amid the clerks and courtiers, that Conscience we may fell.'
For her misdeeds, the maiden, her knee to him did bow,
And of her sins was shriven in shameful wise, I trow,
To him her tale she telleth, a noble gives him there
That he shall be her bedesman, as pandar to serve her fair.
Then swiftly did he assoil her, and spake into her ear,
'A window are we working, that same shall cost us dear,
Now wilt thou glaze that gable, and grave thy name as well,
Thy soul shall be assuréd in Heaven's bliss to dwell.'
'Wist I that,' quoth the woman, 'Window, nor altar high

But I would make, or mend them, and grave my name
thereby,
That all should say the Sister of that house sure were I!'
But God unto all good folk such graving doth forbid —
(*Nesciat sinistra quid faciat dextera*)
And saith, 'Both late and early from thy left hand be hid
That which thy right hand dealeth,' but work so privily
That what in alms thou givest none pride therein may see,
Neither in sight, nor secret, for God doth know withal
Who courteous is and kindly, or who is Envy's thrall. —
Therefore I bid ye, lordings, to hearken this, my rede
And write no more on windows the tale of each good deed
Nor cry ye after God's folk, when alms ye chance to give;
Perchance ye 'll win rewarding while yet on earth ye live,
For that Our Saviour saith it, 't is writ as His own Word:
(*Amen, dico vobis, receperunt mercedem suam*)
'For verily, I tell ye, here shall they have reward.'
And hear this, Mayors, and Masters, who middle-men be
made
Betwixt the King and Commons, to see the laws obeyed,
By cucking-stools to punish, or eke by pillory —
Ye Brewers, Bakers, Butchers, or Cooks, as ye may be,
Of all men these most mischief they work assuredly!
For poor men they, by retail, their goods perforce must buy
And these, the folk they punish, I trow, both loud and still,
They buy their rents, by haggling, they wax rich at their will
On that with which the poor man should now his belly fill.

For an they 'ld dealt more truly they had not built so high,
Nor bought so many houses, that know ye certainly.
The Mayor, Meed the maiden, she gave him counsel there
In silver from such sellers ever to take his share,
Or other gifts than money, as silver cups also,
And rings inset with rubies, favour to such to show.
'For my love,' quoth the lady, 'I bid ye love them well
And tho' 'gainst right and reason suffer them thus to sell.'
Yet Solomon a sermon once made, a sage was he,
The mayors, it shall amend them, and men who lawyers be,
And this the text he taught them, as now I tell to ye —
(*Ignis devorabit tabernacula eorum qui libenter accipiunt munera*)
And thus for the unlearnéd the Latin words I turn
That fire shall fall, and soothly, it at the last shall burn
The house and home of all men who fain would have and hold
The gifts that be unlawful, be they or young, or old.
Now be ye ware, and mark well who deal with law alway
For that your souls must soothly an answer give one day
For wrongs that shall be wrought here by sufferance or behest,
While Chance the choice doth offer, see that ye choose the best.
The King, he came from council, and called the maiden Meed,
And swift he sent the serjeants, to fetch her now with speed.
Thus to the bower they brought her with joy, and eke with bliss
And each with mirth and music would pleasure her, I wis.

The King, in courteous fashion, commencement thought to
make
And unto Meed, the maiden, these words, I trow, he spake —
'Unwise have been thy dealings full often, so I wis,
Yet never of aforetime hast wrought such wrong as this,
To pledge thyself to Falsehood, yet grace I 'll grant to thee,
If never more thou do this, shalt have forgiveness free.
I have a knight hight Conscience, come lately from abroad,
If he for a wife wilt take thee wilt have him for thy lord?'
'Yea, Lord,' now quoth the lady, 'and God forbid alway
That I refuse thy bidding, else hang thou me straightway!'
With that they called on Conscience to come unto the hall
Before the King and Counsel, and clerks and courtiers all,
And Conscience, humbly kneeling, to the King louted low,
The royal will and bidding full fain was he to know.
'Wilt wed thee with this woman, if leave thereto I give,
Thy fellowship she craveth, and as thy mate would live?'
'Nay, nay, may Christ forbid it,' quoth Conscience to the
King,
'May sorrow be my portion ere that I do such thing!
For frail of flesh that maiden, fickle of tongue of yore
Men to misdeeds she leadeth, a score time, yea, and more.
The trust in this, her treasure, doth many a man betray;
She showeth wives and widows of wantonness the way;
She lechery would teach those who love her gifts to share;
She felled our Father Adam, with promises so fair.
And Popes, I trow, hath poisoned, to Holy Church wrought ill,

I trow no worse whore liveth, by Him who made me still,
To-day 'twixt Hell and Heaven, tho' men the wide world sought!
A very wanton is she, with tongue for slander wrought
As common as a cart-road to every knave to-day,
To Mass-priest, and to Minstrel, to Leper by the way.
Summoners, and Assizors, such men, they praise her e'er,
Sheriffs of Shires were shaméd save but their aid she were.
Thro' her, their lands, men lose them, and oft their life thereby;
The prison doors she opens full oft by bribery,
For gold she gives the gaoler, and many a groat beside
That so the false, unfettered, may flee, and safely hide.
The true man hath she taken, and tied him fast anon,
For very hate hath hanged him who harm had never done.
And tho' Consistory curse her, she careth not for this,
Finds capes for each commissary, and clothes their clerks, I wis,
And is of sin assoiléd whenas her pleasure is!
Within one month she doeth as much, I trow, and more,
As Privy Seal may compass in days full seven-score.
She with the Pope is friendly, Provisors with her deal,
Sir Simony together with her, the Bulls they seal.
And oft she blesseth Bishops who all unlearnéd be;
Priest, Prebendary, Parson, she doth maintain them free
To hold their loves and lemans as long as they may live—
To bring forth bairns, permission she 'gainst the law doth give;
And woe unto the kingdom whose King entreats her well,

For she the False doth favour, and oft the True doth fell.
The Baron and the Burgess full oft she bringeth low,
And, bought with these, her jewels, the Judges shame must know.
Against the law she lieth, and hindrance sets withal,
That Faith may not be furthered, so thick her florins fall!
She leads the Law as lists her, and Love-days sets alway
For mazing of the poor man, plead he as best he may.
The Law, it is so lordly, and loth an end to see,
Without or pence, or present, full few content shall be.
Covetousness and the Clergy she coupleth evermore,
Such life she lives, this lady, Christ send her sorrow sore,
And all who now maintain her, misfortune be their part!
The poor, they have no power to plead, tho' sore they smart
Such mastery Meed wieldeth o'er rich men, hard of heart!'
Then Meed, she made sore mourning, bemoaned her to the King,
And prayed for space to speak there, and answer meet to bring,
Then grace the King did grant her, with right goodwill alway,
'Now, if thou canst excuse thee, for more I may not say,
Since Conscience hath accused thee, and bade thee go thy way.'
'Nay, Lord,' now quoth the lady, 'believe not all this ill,
Ere that ye wot full truly where wrong, it lieth still,
Where Mischief, he is master there Meed may help that tide,
And Conscience, well thou knowest I came not here to chide

Or to upbraid thy person with a proud heart and high,
For well thou wottest, Conscience, save that thou think'st to lie,
That on my neck didst throw thee, eleven times full told,
From me hast ta'en, and given, at thine own will, my gold,
Why thou should'st now be wrathful, in truth it wonders me
While I may, as aforetime, by my gifts forward thee,
And may maintain thy manhood more than doth now appear —
And yet, in the King's presence dost foul defame me here!
Yet ne'er a King I killéd, nor counselled such a thing,
Nor dealt I e'er as thou didst, I swear it by the King!
Not for my sake annoyance he met in Normandy,
By thee he there was shaméd, I saw it soothfastly!
Didst creep into a cabin for fingers cold and sore,
Deeming, methinks, the winter should last for evermore;
Dreading lest thou be dead there for rain clouds over-cast
Didst haste thee home for hunger that grips the vitals fast.
Thou Pillager *sans* pity, the poor thou didst rob there,
Their goods to sell at Calais upon thy back didst bear.
But with my Lord I lingered, his life to save was fain,
Much mirth I made from mourning to rouse him, and from pain.
Men on the back I patted, with boldness did them fill
And high they sprang then, hoping to have me at their will.
Had I then been his Marshal, by Mary, Heaven's Queen,
I'ld laid my life in wager, no lesser pledge, I ween,

He'ld hold that land in lordship, its length and breadth to win,
King of that folk had made him, to helping of his kin,
That of his blood the least bairn a Baron's peer had been —
Thou, Conscience, gavest him counsel to leave that land, I ween,
And for a little silver that lordship lose again
That is of realms the richest o'er which a King may reign.
It doth become a monarch who o'er his realm is lord
To those who humbly serve him to give their due reward;
On aliens and all men bestow both gifts and gold,
Meed maketh him belovéd, his manhood doth uphold,
And be he Earl or Emperor, or any lord beside
Gifts to young men he giveth in this, his train, to ride.
The Pope, and these his Prelates, presents to take are fain,
And they themselves reward those who do their laws maintain.
And Servants for their service, 't is sooth as well ye see,
Take meed from these their Masters, e'en as they shall agree,
And Beggars, for prayers promised, men give them meed alway,
And for their mirth the Minstrels receive a fitting pay.
The King his men rewardeth that peace in land they hold,
And men who know clerks learnéd from them they crave the gold.
The Priests who preach to people, and warn them for their good,

From them ask meed, and Mass-pence, and therewithal their food.
And every kind of craftsman for prentice taketh meed,
And Meed, I trow, and Merchandise, have of each other need
And none may do without her who well in life would speed!'
'Now,' quoth the King to Conscience, 'by Christ it seemeth me
That Meed, she shall be worthy to have the mastery!'
'Nay,' to the King quoth Conscience, and bended low the knee,
'Now by thy leave my dear Lord *two* Meeds there sure shall be,
The one by God is given of Grace, in this, His Bliss,
To those who work full truly His Will while here, I wis,
The prophet, he hath preached it, in Psalter set it fair —
(*Qui peccuniam suam non dedit ad usuram*).
And *Meed* my Lord, of true men I pray ye take it ne'er.
But love them, and believe them, for love of Heaven's Lord,
And God's Meed, and His Mercy, be told ye for reward.
There is a Meed *sans* mesure, desiring mastery,
Who would maintain misdoers, such craves rewarding free,
And thereof quoth the Psalter, at end it standeth writ,
(*In quorum manibus iniquitates sunt, dextera eorum repleta est muneribus*)
"And full of gifts their right hand is heaped" it runs, to wit.
They who those gifts have graspéd, so help me God on high,
Shall bitterly have bought them, or else the Book doth lie.

And Priests, I trow, and Parsons, who please them in this thing,
From men take Meed and money for Masses that they sing
Shall have reward in this world, as Matthew surely spake —
(*Amen, dico vobis, receperunt mercedem suam*)
What labourers and low folk shall from their masters take
As Meed should not be reckoned, but hire both just and fair
Nor is there Meed in Merchandise, that do I well declare,
But fair exchange, one penny its worth receiveth there.
Didst never read aforetime in Kings, thou recreant Meed,
Why vengeance fell was wreakéd on Saul and all his seed?
God sent His word of old time, by Samuel's mouth he spoke,
That Amalek, and Agag, and with him all his folk,
Should die for deed unlawful they 'gainst his elders wrought
On Israel, and Aaron, and Moses mischief brought.
Then Samuel to Saul spake, "God sendeth thee alway,
See that thou be obedient, His Bidding well obey,
With thine host wend thee thither, the women, kill them all,
The children, and the churls too, chop thou in pieces small;
And see the King thou killest, and covet not his gold,
For millions of money shalt not thy sword withhold,
But bairn and beast shalt burn them to ashes, young and old."
And, since the King he killed not, as God Himself did say,
But coveted fair cattle, was loath the beasts to slay,
And back with him did bring them, as ye may read alway,
God sent to say by Samuel that Saul should surely die,
And all his seed, for this sin, should end full shamefully.

Such mischief Meed, her counsel, made for King Saul of yore,
He and his heirs were hated by God for evermore.
I 'll tarry not to show thee to what this tale doth tend.
As 'venture doth it vex me, thereof I'll make an end.
But as it chanced to Agag so shall men ever see
For Samuel still shall slay him, and Saul, he blamed shall be;
A diadem for David, and daunting for the ill,
A Christian King to rule us, and keep us safely still!
I Conscience, surely know this, for Mother-Wit hath taught,
At last Right Reason reigneth, realms 'neath her rule be brought,
No more on Earth, I trow me, shall Meed the master be,
But Lowliness and True Love shall reign with Loyalty.
Who against Truth doth trespass, or deal with Falsity,
By law shall Loyalty judge him, or lose his life thereby.
Nor Serjeant for that service a hood of silk shall wear,
Nor in a gay robe garb him, all richly furred and fair.
Meed maketh of misdoers rich men, and therewithal,
Doth Loyalty wax poorer, while Law is lord of all,
And Cruelty commandeth, to banish Kindness fain —
But Righteousness, she cometh, with Conscience in her train,
Law shall be forced to labour, while Love o'er all doth reign!'

PASSUS IV

'Cease,' quoth the King to Conscience, 'no more I 'll suffer thee,
Be reconciled henceforward, and both my servants be,

Kiss her — ' the King commanded, 'it is my will alway' —
'Nay, nay, by Christ,' quoth Conscience, 'I'ld rather go my
way,
For save that Reason rede me thereto, I'ld rather die!'
'Now do I here command thee,' the King quoth speedily,
'In haste to ride make ready, and fetch me Reason here,
Command from me his coming, that he my counsel hear,
For he shall rule my realm now, by his rede I'll be sped
Of Meed, and many another, and who with her shall wed;
And hold account with Conscience, so help me Christ alway,
Of how my folk thou leadest, the learnéd, and the lay.'
'Fain am I of that forward!' Conscience, he quoth, and so,
Rode on his way to Reason, in his ear whispered low,'
And said e'en as the King sent, and straight his way would
go
'For riding I'll array me,' quoth Reason, 'rest ye now,'
Cato his knave he summoned, courteous of speech I trow,
'Saddle my steed that's calléd "*I-bide-my-time*" straightway
And see that well thou gird him with many girths, I pray,
With heavy bridle bit him that low his head he bear,
Yet shall he neigh full often ere yet he cometh there.'
Then Conscience, on his charger, he pricked him forth amain,
And Reason with him riding, to hasten were they fain.
But Wit and Wisdom mounted upon a wain that day,
And followed fast on Reason, for that it chanced that they
In Chancery and Exchequer would fain dischargéd be
And fast they rode that Reason might rede them warily,

To save themselves from shaming and harm, as at that while —
But Conscience came to court first, by distance of a mile,
And hastening forth with Reason came straight unto the King.
The King a courteous greeting to Reason fain would bring,
He set him on the bench there, betwixt him and his son,
Together well and wisely at length they spake anon.
With that came Peace to parley, and set forth in a Bill
How Wrong his wife had taken, I trow, against his will;
How Rose, one Reynald's leman, ruthless, he ravished there;
And Margaret did un-maiden, nor would her blushes spare:
'My geese and swine he taketh, with them his men be fed,
I may not strive nor chide them, I trow, for very dread.
He borrowed from me Bayard, nor brought me back my steed,
Nor gave a farthing for him for aught that I might plead.
His men he but maintaineth that murder may be done,
My sales he aye forestalleth, beateth my bargains down;
He breaketh down my barn-door, my wheat he bears away,
Of oats, for full ten quarter will but by tally pay;
And therewith doth he beat me, and with my maid doth lie
And I have not the courage to face him, verily!'
The King, he knew Peace spake sooth, for Conscience told him so, —
Then Wrong was sore affrighted, to Wisdom did he go,
And money there he proffered his peace with pence to buy.
Quoth: 'Had I the King's favour, then little care had I

Tho' Peace and all his party ceased not complaint to make.'
With that he went forth, Wisdom, and Wit with him did take
And since that Wrong had wrought thus, and dealt thus wickedly,
The twain spake wisely to him, and warned him soothfastly:
'Now whoso wilful worketh, he stirs up Wrath, I trow,
And to thyself we say it, thou sure shalt prove it now,
Save Meed shall help thy mischief thou shalt full sorely pay,
Thy life and lands, they lie both in the King's Grace, to-day.'
Then Wrong, he wept full sorely, and prayed for Wisdom's aid,
And for his secret counsel full readily he paid.
Wisdom and Wit together they go their way anon,
And Meed, they take her with them, that Mercy may be won.
Peace putteth forth his head there, his blood-stained scalp doth show:
'Thus was I harmed all guiltless, as God doth surely know.'
The King, I trow, and Conscience, full well the truth they knew,
For well they wot of old-time that Wrong was aye a shrew.
But Wit and Wisdom swiftly they worked, and warily,
To overcome with chattels the King, if so might be;
The King, by Christ he sware it, and by his crown also,
That Wrong, for his misdoing, should surely suffer woe,
A constable commanded that he in irons be cast,
'He shall not see his feet now till seven years be past.'

'Nay, nay, God wot,' quoth Wisdom, 'a better way I know,
But let him make amends here, and surety bid him show,
And bail now let him borrow, that he his boot now buy,
And so amend his misdeeds, and better be thereby.'
And Wit therewith accorded, and spake thus without fail,
'I trow that it be better for Boot to lower Bale
Than that Bale should be beaten, nor Boot the better be.'
Then Meed, she sought for mercy, in all humility,
And proffered Peace a present, 't was all of pure red gold,
'Take this,' she quoth, 'for mischief amends by me be told,
And I for Wrong will wager he'll no more do such thing.'
With that did Peace, full piteous, make prayer unto the King,
To show to that man mercy who oft misdeed had wrought—
'For he amends hath made me, as Wisdom him hath taught,
Here I his guilt forgive him, of right goodwill to-day,
So that assent ye give now, I think no more to say,
Since Meed amends hath made me, I may not ask for more—'
'Nay, by the Bliss,' the King quoth, 'God hath for me in store,
Till that I have full knowledge from hence Wrong goes not free,
An he escaped so lightly, he well might laugh at me,
He would but wax the bolder, to beat my men alway.
Save Reason can release him he in the stocks must stay
Long as I live, I trow me, for greater love 't will make—'
Then some, they cried on Reason, and prayed him pity take

On Wrong, the King to counsel, and Conscience at that same,
Straight they besought that Reason should Meed for surety
name —
'Nay, rede me not,' quoth Reason, 'to have toward him ruth
Until all lords and ladies in very deed love Truth,
And Pernel lay her finery there, her trunks aside,
And children over-cherished with rod shall be chastised.
Till holiness of harlot receive but hind's reward;
And Clerks and Knights, henceforward, be courteous of their
word,
And hating riotous living forswear for aye such deed.
And Priests approve their preaching by practice of their rede,
And by their deeds shall draw men to walk in Wisdom's way —
St. James's shrine be sought for e'en as I think to say,
And no man seek Galicia but that he there will stay!
They who to Rome be runners, for robbers who dwelt there,
Across the sea no silver with the King's sign shall bear,
Nor groat nor gold engravéd with royal crown to see
Save that, if found at Dover, the same shall forfeit be;
Save Messengers, or Merchants, or Merchants' men, per-
chance,
Or Priests, or eke Provisors, whom the Pope doth advance.
Yet by the Rood (quoth Reason) no ruth I'll show withal
While Meed as yet hath mastery to plead within this hall!
But I may show examples, yea, I, myself, do say
And by my soul I swear it, if it were so alway
That I, as King, were crownéd, a Kingdom to uphold,

Should never wrong in this world, an it to me were told,
Go from my power unpunished lest loss my soul should know,
Nor yet by gift win grace here, God help me to do so!
Nor should for Meed have mercy, but for Humility,
For truly *nullum malum* should know impunity,
Nor *irremuneratum* should *nullum bonum* be!
Now let thy Clerks in English, Sir King, these words construe,
And if by wit thou workest, I pledge mine ears thereto,
That Law full soon must labour, and carry dung afield,
With Love to lead thy people thy rule thou light shalt wield!'
Then Clerks who were Confessors they took them counsel here
That they this clause construe now, and make its meaning clear,
When Reason, he rehearséd those words the men before,
Was none within that hall there, or were they less or more,
But Reason held for Master, judged Meed a wretch, I trow —
Love set but lightly by her, to scorn he laughs her now
And saith to her so loudly that Soothness needs must hear,
'Who wills for wife this maiden, holding her wealth so dear,
As cuckold shall be holden, or cut my ears off both!'
Wisdom, and Wit his fellow, to answer they were loath,
Neither a word could weave there, that Reason might gainsay,
Staring, his speech they studied, and stood as beasts at bay.
The King (by Christ he spake it) to Reason gave accord
Rehearsed that Reason's showing was right in deed and word,
'Yet, by my head, 't were hard now to govern thus to-day

And my liege men to lead thus upon the rightful way!'
'By Christ upon the Rood rent,' Reason he answered there,
'Save that thy realm I rule thus my ribs asunder tear
If it be so Obedience shall give assent to me —'
The King quoth: 'That I grant thee, Our Lady witness be,
And here be come my Council, of Clerks and Earls it is —
Yet trow me, Reason, swiftly thou rid'st not hence, I wis,
For long as be my lifetime I will not let thee go!'
'Ready were I,' quoth Reason, 'to rest with thee also
Were Conscience of your council no better lot I'ld know.'
'That boon be gladly granted, God keep him aye with me,
I pray for all my lifetime we three true friends may be!'

PASSUS V

With that the King, his knights, too, to Church they gat them there
Mattins and Mass to hearken, and then to meat they fare.
I wakened from my vision and woe was me, I ween,
I had not slept more soundly, and thereby more had seen.
Ere I had fared a furlong faintness did o'er me creep,
No foot might I go further for sheer default of sleep.
Softly adown I sat me, my beads began to tell,
And saying of my *Credo*, once more on sleep I fell.
Much more, I trow, was shown me than I before have told,
I saw that field all full of folk whereof I spake of old;
Conscience, a Cross upholding, he preached to them that day,
And that the folk take pity upon themselves did pray.

The Pestilence, he proved it, came for their sins alone,
The South-West wind that lately one Saturday had blown,
Was meant their pride to punish, no reason else he found,
Before it pear and plum trees were levelled to the ground,
To give to men ensample their lives to better now;
The beeches and broad oak trees were blown to earth, I trow,
And, with their roots turned upward, as warning dread they lay
That deadly sin should doom men to loss on Judgment Day.
Methinks upon this matter full long my speech might be,
But as God is my Helper, I say what I did see.
How Conscience with the Cross came to preach the folk unto,
Bade Wasters go and work there, e'en as they best might do,
And win that which they wasted by such craft as might be —
Pernel, he prayed her straitly, to leave her finery
And keep it in the coffer, against a time of need.
Thomas he taught with staves twain, to take his way with speed,
And fetch him home Felicé from good-wives' penalty;
And Wat's wife, so he warned him, from blame should not be free,
Her head-gear had a mark cost, and but a groat his hood —
Chapmen he charged to chasten their children for their good,
Nor watchful eye be wanting whileas they youthful be.
Prelates and Priests together he prayed them earnestly
That what they preached the people they should in practice prove

'Live ye as ye would learn us, so shall ye have our love.'
Sithen, he bade Religion to rule with stricter sway
'Lest that the King and Council your lands shall take away
And in your stead be Steward till better rede ye learn.
Ye, who St. James go seeking, to Rome your faces turn,
St. Truth I bid ye seek now, for he may save ye all
Qui cum Patre et Filio — May fair Fate ye befall.'
Then thither ran Repentance, rehearsed this theme right well,
Till William wept, and water fast from his eyes it fell;
And Pernel proud-heart laid her flat on the ground that tide
And lay long ere she looked up, and on Our Lady cried,
And pledged herself full truly to Him who all hath made
To throw off her rich raiment, in hair-shirt be arrayed.
To tame her flesh to frailty and sin too much inclined:
'No more by pride uplifted, I'll be of lowly mind,
And silent, suffer slander, for that was ne'er my way;
But now I do abase me, and Mercy meekly pray
That I aforetime envy within mine heart did hide.'
Lechery, loud lamenting, upon Our Lady cried
That she on him have mercy, and on his sore misdeed,
And, for his soul, so sinful, to God should intercede,
By token that on Saturday till seven years were o'er
He'ld drink with the ducks only, and dine but once, no more.
Envy, with heart so heavy, he craved for shrift also,
And his great guilt confessing, his sin he now would show.
As pale as any pellet, as palsied he had been,
In coarse cloth clad, his fashion I may not tell, I ween;

He ware a cape and kirtle, a knife was at his side,
As Friar's frock were fashioned his sleeves both long and wide.
As leek that hath been lying long-time beneath the sun
So with lean cheeks looked Envy, scowling on every one.
All swollen was his body, for wrath his lips he'ld bite,
His fist fast clenched for anger, he'ld 'venge him, if he might
With works or words, if only a fitting time he see —
Venom, I trow, or Verjuice, or Vinegar, maybe,
Within my belly boileth, and waxeth so alway
I may not do as likes me, I trow, for many a day,
Such wind within me waxeth ere ever dine I may.
I have a neighbour nigh me, his harm full oft I sought,
Behind his back I blamed him, disgrace upon him brought
And punished him full often, as in my power it lay;
To lords I did belie him, that fines he needs must pay,
With my false tongue I turnéd his friend into a foe,
His favour and good-fortune, I trow, they grieved me so.
Betwixt him and his household such strife by me was made
That thro' my tongue the forfeit in life and limb he paid.
When I in market met him, for all the hate I bare,
I hailed him there as kindly as tho' his friend I were!
Yet hurt I scarce may do him, for stronger far is he —
Yet had I might and mastery, murdered he sure should be!
When to the Kirk I get me, and kneel before the Rood,
To pray for all the people, as the Priest saith I should,
I cry, on knee low bending: 'Christ give them sorrow meet

Who of my bowl have robbed me, and ta'en away my sheet.
Then, from the Altar turning, mine eyes must needs behold
How Heyne, and eke his good wife, have new coats for their
old,
I would 't were mine, their vesture, and all the web thereby!
I laugh whenas he loses, my heart for joy beats high,
And if so be he winneth, I weep and wail anon,
I doom men for ill-doing, and worse myself have done.
Thro' all the world I would men should but my servants be,
Whoso hath more than I have, full sore it angers me.
Thus do I live all loveless, like an ill dog withal,
And all my breast it swelleth for bitterness of gall.
No sugar may its sweetness to cure my lack impart
Nor ever Diopendium may drive it from my heart,
If shrift from thence may sweep it, it hath a wondrous art!'
'Yea, truly,' quoth Repentance, good rede he read him then,
'Sorrow for sin, I trow me, it saveth many men.'
'Sorry am I,' quoth Envy, 'and seldom else, I wot,
And that but mad doth make me, since I may 'venge me not.'
Then Covetousness cometh, his fashion faileth me,
So hungry and so hollow, Sir Hervey's mien should be,
And beetle-browed to look on, with bleared eye as well,
His cheeks all loose and wrinkled as leathern purse they fell.
Clad in a tattered tabard, that saw twelve winters' wear,
And did a louse leap on it, why then it seemed me there
It might not far have wandered, the cloak it was threadbare!
This Caitiff quoth, 'I Covetous aforetime was, I ween,

Sim at the Oak, his servant for sometime have I been,
I was his plighted 'prentice, his profits were my care
And in the art of lying I first took lessons there.
To weigh and measure falsely I learnt from him also,
To Winchester and Weyhill at Fair-time did I go,
With merchandise full many, e'en as my master bade,
But for the grace of Guile I, there with my wares, displayed,
Unsold, so Heaven help me, for seven years they'ld be, —
Then drawn to serve the Drapers, I learnt my *A B C*
How well to stretch the edging that longer seemed the stuff,
And midst their fair striped fabrics lessons I learned enough,
With needle neat to sew them, together pleat them fair,
Then in a press to put them, and so to pin them there
Till twelve, or maybe ten, yards as thirteen one might sell.
At Westminster, my goodwife, with woollen cloths dealt well;
She spake unto the spinsters to spin it light and soft,
The pound by which she paid it, I trow, it weighed full oft
A quarter more than by me in balance tested true.
Then did I buy her barley that she for sale might brew,
And Penny-ale, and Perry I trow, she poured therein
For labourers, and poor folk, who must their living win.
The best, in the bed-chamber, beside the wall it lay
And whoso thereof tasted, he bought the same straightway,
And paid a groat the gallon, at no less cost 't was his
When served out by the cup-full, such craft was her's I wis!
Rose the Retailer hight she, that is her name, I trow,
And huckstery she holdeth eleven winters now.

But I will swear now soothly such sin to put away,
No more to use false measure, nor wickedly to weigh.
To Walsingham I'll wend me, with Rose my wife straightway
And pray the Rood of Brunholm that we our debts may pay.
Now Gluttony beginneth to think of shriving there,
And for to make confession kirkward he fain would fare;
Betun the brewster met him, 'Good-morrow' did she say,
And straight she asketh of him, 'Whither dost take thy way?'
'To Holy Church,' so quoth he, 'to hearken Mass I'm fain,
And there will I be shriven, and never sin again.'
She quoth: 'Now Gossip Glutton, my good ale wilt assay?'
'Hast thou,' he quoth, 'hot spices here to thine hand to-day?'
'Yea, Glutton Gossip,' quoth she, 'in spices I'm well found,
Pepper have I, and Piones, and Garlic by the pound,
And Fennel by the farthing, for fasting-day 't is meet —'
Then Gluttony, he entered, and others did he greet,
Found Cis on the bench sitting, the cobbler's wife was she,
Wat, with his wife beside him, he Warrener should be,
Tomkyn was there, the tinker, two knaves with him as well,
The Ostler Hick, and with him Hogg, who did needles sell.
Clarice of Cook's Lane sat there, the parish Clerk beside,
Sir Pers was there, of Pridye, Pernel of Flemish pride;
And there was Daw the ditcher, and full a dozen told,
A Player on the rebeck, a Raker of the mold,
A Rat-catcher, a Roper, and Rose who dishes sold.
Of Garlickhithe was Godfrey, Griffin, the Welshman born,

And of upholsterers many who, thus, at early morn
With right goodwill gave Glutton good ale as gift that tide;
Clement was there, the cobbler, his cloak he cast aside
And offered it for barter, he laid it there to sell,
The Ostler Hick, he proffered his hood for sale as well,
And bade that Bet the butcher for him the bargain tell.
With that were chapmen chosen, the wares they should appraise,
He, who the hood had holden, should have amends always.
With that they rose up swiftly and strove together there,
The penny-worths, they praised them, and would the portions share
And they who spake and hearkened, full many an oath they sware!
They could not on their conscience accord in any wise,
Till that the Roper, Robin, was forced by them to rise
Named of them all as umpire, that strife to end be brought
The pledges, to appraise them even as best he thought,
He spake that Hick the ostler the cloak have of good will,
By covenant that Clement the cup should rightly fill;
And take Hick's hood unto him, and hold it for good pay,
And he who first repented he should arise straightway
And give Sir Glutton greeting, nor drink thereto should fail,
And so they laughed and loitered, and cried, 'Now pass the ale!'
And beverages and bargains were made them all among —
And so they sat and sang there till it was Evensong,

And Glutton, he had gulped down a gallon full ere long.
Till he his staff had taken he had no strength to go,
But like a gleeman's dog still he wavered to and fro,
Sometimes aside he wandered, then backward took his way,
As one to catch the small birds his lines with care doth lay.
When nigh unto the doorway his eyes waxed dim anon,
He stumbled on the threshold, and on the ground fell prone.
Clement the cobbler caught him, fast by the middle made,
And for aloft to lift him upon his knees he laid.
But Glutton was a great churl, a heavy load to bear —
With all the woe in this world his wife and servant there
Homeward to bed they bare him, and laid him safe therein,
And after this, his surfeit, such sickness did he win,
All Saturday and Sunday he slept till set of sun,
Then from his sleep he wakened, and wiped his eyes anon,
And with his first word queried, 'Where now the cup might
be?'
His wife, she did upbraid him for wickedness, till he
Was by her words sore shaméd, and scratched his ears, I trow
And grimly did he greet there, and dole he made enow,
For this, his life so wicked, that he had lived afore —
'Now here I make avowing, for thirst nor hunger sore
Shall never fish on Friday by me digested be
Save Abstinence mine Aunt, she permission give me free,
Whom from my heart I 've hated the while in life I be!'
Then Sloth, for sorrow swooning, upon the ground he lies,
Till Vigilance, the Watchman, cast water in his eyes,

And on the face he smote him, and cried on him that day:
'Against Despair I warn thee, that shall thee sure betray,
Now to thyself say surely, "I sorrow for my sin!"
And on thy breast now beating, pray God His Grace to win,
For ne'er so great hath Guilt been that Mercy was not more.'
Then Sloth, upright he sat him, and oft he sighed full sore
A vow to God he made there, his foul sloth to amend,
That ne'er should come a Sunday, till seven years should end,
(Save he were let for sickness) that, ere the dawn of day
Like monk, to Mass and matins, to church he 'ld take his way.
'Nor after meat I 'll linger, altho' the ale be good
Till Evensong I 've hearkened, I swear it by the Rood.
And back again I'll give it, if that I so may do,
All that by sin I won me since I had wit thereto.
Tho' livelihood be lacking, yet ne'er for that I'll stay,
But each shall have his own back ere that I go my way.
With residue and remnant, on Chester's Rood I swear
Saint Truth I will go seeking, ere yet to Rome I fare.'
Then Robert, he the robber, on restitution thought,
And sooth he wept full sorely to find not what he sought,
Yet in his heart the sinner still to himself did say:
'Christ, who on Cross fast nailéd, on Calvary died that day,
When Dysmas, he my brother, for Grace there prayed to Thee,
On that man didst have mercy, for his "Remember me."
Now work Thy Will upon me, who have deservéd well

Save for that one hope only, to burn for aye in Hell.
Have ruth for me now, Robert, for little rede have I,
Nor ween to win to Heaven by craft or subtlety,
But for Thy mickle Mercy, I pray Thee in my need
Condemn me not on Doomsday for this my evil deed!'
Now what befell this felon I may not truly tell,
But well I wot he wept fast, and swift the drops down fell,
As he his guilt acknowledged, to Christ made promise true
That Penitence, his pike staff, he'ld polish now anew,
His lifetime long to journey with this o'er land was fain,
Lucifer's brother, Latro, with him, too long he'd lain.
With that, of men a thousand together throng with speed,
With weeping sore, and wailing, for this, their evil deed,
To Christ their cries rise upward, they to His Mother pray
For grace Saint Truth to seek now — God grant them this alway!

PASSUS VI

Now forth that folk have ridden, or yet afoot they range,
To seek that Saint fast speeding thro' distant lands and strange;
Few men, I trow, among them were wise enough to know
The way, like beasts forth bustling, o'er hill and vale they go.
While at their will they wandered, I trow, they went astray,
A man at last hath met them when long upon their way,
Apparelled as a Palmer, in pilgrim's weed all told,
A staff with broad list bounden he in his hand did hold,
In wise as 't were a wood-bine about the staff 't was tied,

And bag and bowl, I trow me, he bare them at his side.
His hat bare of ampullæ a hundred all arow,
And signs of Sinai had he, with scallop shells to show.
His cloak bare many crosses, with Keys of Rome 't was wrought,
The Vernicle upon it, that men mistake him naught,
But by these signs see clearly the shrines that he had sought.
Then fair, this folk they asked him, from whence he came alway?
'From Sinai and the Sepulchre,' he answered them straightway,
'From Bethlehem and Babylon, both cities have I seen,
In India, and Asia, and many a land I 've been;
By these, my signs, ye'll see well, that on my hat are set,
That widely have I wandered, by weather dry or wet,
And sought good Saints that healing my soul thereby might get.'
'Dost know a Saint most holy, Saint Truth men do him call,
Can'st on the way direct us to find his home withal?'
'Nay, so God give me gladness,' the man made answer there,
'For never saw I Palmer who staff and scrip did bear
Who for such saint was seeking, or to such shrine would fare!'
'By Peter,' quoth a Ploughman, and stept from out the throng
'I know him e'en as closely as Clerk doth know Plainsong,
For Common-sense and Conscience, they led me there of yore,
And in his service surely I'll bide for evermore;

For him to sow and plant still while that my strength shall
last
For I have been his servant these fifteen winters past,
To sow his seed, his cattle to follow in the field
And eke his corn to harvest, and carry home the yield.
I ditched for him, and delvéd, his bidding follow fair,
Within, without, untiring, I for his profit care;
Amid his folk no labourer shall dearer to Him be,
Tho' I myself shall say it, He is well pleased with me!
From Him I have good payment, at times be over-paid,
He is the promptest payer that e'er a poor man prayed,
From none his hire withholding, at eve pays all and each.
He as a lamb is humble, and gentle in His speech,
And if ye will I show ye where He abides to-day
To this His home and dwelling I well may lead the way.'
'Yea, dear Piers,' quoth the Palmer, and money proffered
there.
Quoth Piers, 'By my soul's peril —' and therewith straitly
sware
'I will not take a farthing, for all Saint Thomas' shrine,
For many a day thereafter less love from Truth were mine.
But ye who wend unto Him, by this way shall ye go —
First must ye pass thro' Meekness, both man and wife also,
Till ye be come to Conscience, who Christ's own Truth doth
show —
That ye shall love Him better than Life, which ye hold dear,
And next to Him your neighbour, nor deal in such way here

Save but as thou desirest that men should deal with thee —
Follow a brook, whose name is "*Your speech shall courteous be,*"
The ford, "*Your fathers honour*" there shall ye find, I trow,
Wade ye into that water, and wash ye well enow,
And all your life thereafter ye shall more lightly go —
Then "*Swear not save 't is needful,*" ye shall before ye know,
And, "*Take thou not all lightly the Name of God most High*" —
Then to a croft ye come well, but that ye shall pass by,
"*Covet not,*" it is calléd, "*another's kine nor wife,*
Nor e'en another's servant, nor aught that wakens strife,"
Look that ye break no bough there, save that it be thine own, —
Anigh, two stocks be standing, but pass thou swiftly on,
"*Slay not,*" they 're named, and "*Steal not,*" both shall by ye be past,
Leave them upon the lefthand, nor backward glances cast,
Thy holy day be holden full well till eventide.
The brook "*Bear no false witness*" from that turn thou aside,
'T is all adorned with florins, and oaths wax fast and thick,
Thy soul wouldst save from peril, beware a plant to pick.
Then shalt thou soon see "*Say sooth, if in thy power it be,*
And look well that thou lie not for any man's decree" —
So to a Court thou comest, as sunshine clear 't is found,
And all the moat is Mercy that runs that manor round,
The walls of Wit are builded, that Will's assault may brave,
The battlements of Christendom, that many folk shall save.
With sure Belief 't is buttressed, the same shall save us all,

And every house is roofed there, be it or bower or hall,
With Love, all Lead is lacking, "*As Brethren are ye one,*" —
The tower wherein Truth dwelleth is set above the sun,
He dealeth with the Day-Star, e'en as it seems Him best,
And Death, he dare do nothing against Truth's high behest.
Grace at His gate is warder, a good man, sooth to tell,
His servant is "*Amend thou,*" full many know him well,
Give thou to him this token, 't is known of Truth alway,
"*I have performed the penance the priest on me did lay,*
Sore for my sins I sorrow, and so should I do e'er
Oft as I think upon them altho' a Pope I were" —
Then shalt thou bid "*Amend thou,*" unto his master pray
The wicket gate to open, that now doth bar the way
Because both Eve and Adam ate what their bane should be —
Altho' the King, He sleepeth, yet Grace doth keep the key
And if so be he grant thee in such wise thro' to go
Then Truth Himself enthronéd within thine heart shalt know,
Look thou that well thou love Him, and that His law thou hold!
But be of Wrath right wary, for wicked he of old,
And on his side is Envy, that in thine heart doth dwell,
And Pride, that surely spurs thee to praise thyself o'er-well.
If Good deeds wax to Boldness, thine eyes they sure shall blind,
So shalt thou thence be driven, and the door shut behind
Securely barred and bolted to keep thee from its bliss,
Haply ere years a hundred thou shalt not pass, I wis.

Thus may His Love be lost now by thy Self-will alway,
By Grace again may'st win it, but ne'er by gift or pay.
But there be Seven Sisters, servants to Truth they be
As porters at the postern these seven may ye see,
One Abstinence is calléd, Humility, her pair;
And Charity, and Chastity, the twain be maidens fair;
Patience and Peace full many have helped to bliss to win;
And Largesse, gracious lady, she leadeth many in.
The kindred of these sisters, so help me God on high,
Therein is wondrous welcome, received right graciously,
But save we may claim kinship with these same sisters fair,
By my head, hard we 'll find it, to all I now declare,
To win at that gate entrance, save grace the more be there!'
'By Christ then,' quoth a Cut-Purse, 'no kin am I, I wot!'
'Nay,' quoth an Ape-ward swiftly, 'methinks I know them not!'
Quoth a Wayfarer, wistful, 'If this were sooth, I know,
That for no Friar's preaching a foot I 'ld further go!'
'Yea,' then spake Piers the Ploughman, and showed them all
forthright,
'There dwells a Maiden Mercy, who o'er them all hath might,
With Sinners hath she kinship, yea, and her Son also,
And if the twain will aid ye, (none other help ye 'll know,)
Ye may find grace sufficient within that gate to go!'

PASSUS VII

'Methinks this way were wicked, save that a guide we gain
Whose footsteps we might follow, and to that goal attain —'

'By Peter the Apostle,' the ploughman, Piers, did say,
'I harrow an half-acre that lies by the high-way,
An once I well had ploughed it, then would I wend with ye
And on the right road guide ye, till Truth Himself ye see.'
'But that were a long waiting,' a veiléd lady cried,
'What shall we do, we women, while we your will abide?'
'Some shall sew sacks that safely the wheat be stored therein,
Ye wives who have wool with you, see that the same ye spin
Yea, speedily now spin it, nor for sore fingers leave,
Save Holy-Day be holden, or eke a Holy Eve.
And look ye out your linen, and labour fast thereon,
The Needy and the Naked, take heed to them anon,
Against the cold now clothe them for so Truth's will shall be;
For livelihood I 'll find them save the land faileth me
While life be mine, for His Love who high in Heaven doth sit —
And ye, ye lovely Ladies, with fingers long, to wit,
Who have both silk and sendal, I bid ye sew it there
In Chasubles for Chaplains, and deck your churches fair.
And men of every manner, all ye who live by meat,
Help him to work with vigour who winneth what ye eat.'
'By Christ,' a knight quoth boldly, 'thy rede it seemeth fair,
But saving one time truly thus taught have I been ne'er,'
Quoth the knight, 'Teach me only, and I will learn to plough
And help thee in thy labour while life doth last, I trow.'
Quoth Piers: 'Now, by Saint Peter, for these thy words, i-troth,

I 'll toil and sweat right gladly, and sow seed for us both,
And for thy love will labour my life long, verily,
By covenant that thou keepest both Holy Church and me
From wicked men, and wasters, who would us fain destroy —
In hunting hares and foxes thou shalt thy time employ,
And bears and bucks go chasing, they break my hedges still,
And fetch thee home thy falcons that they the wild fowl kill
That haunt my croft, and rob me of these, my crops of wheat.'
With that, the knight, full courteous, answered in fashion meet:
'Now Piers, by this my power, I plight my troth to thee
Thus to fulfil our forward while life be left to me.'
'Yet one point,' quoth Piers plainly, 'no more of thee I pray,
Trouble thou ne'er a tenant save Truth assent alway,
And if, or gift, or present, by poor man proffered be,
Take it not, lest it happen thou undeserving be,
For then must thou repay it, when the year's end doth fall
Within a place of peril men Purgatory call.
And ne'er misuse thy bondmen, so shalt thou speed thee well;
Thyself, of tongue be truthful, and hate vain tales to tell,
Save but of wit or wisdom, thy workmen to amend.
Hold no discourse with ribalds, nor ear unto them lend,
And above all at meal-times, do thou such men eschew,
They be the Devil's jesters, that do I tell thee true!'
'By Saint James,' quoth the Knight then, 'thereto do I assent,
And by thy word I 'll work now, while life to me is lent!'
'I shall me now apparel,' quoth Piers, 'in pilgrim's weed

And wend with ye the right way till Truth ye find indeed.'
His clothes he cast upon him, but ragged clouts were they,
Did on his cuffs and gaiters to keep the cold away,
Instead of scrip a hopper he on his back did sling
And of bread corn a bushel therein he thought to bring —
'For I myself would sow it, and sithen with ye go,
Who helpeth me to harrow, or toil with me would know,
By Christ he shall at harvest the richer hire receive,
With corn shall make him merry tho' grudging souls may
grieve.
And every kind of craftsmen who know by Truth to live
A faithful life, right freely their food to them I 'll give.
Save only Jack the Jongleur, and Janet of loose life,
And Robert, he the Ribald, whose evil tales be rife,
For Truth one-while he taught me, I tell ye for your weal,
("*Deleantur de libro*"), with them ye shall not deal.
For Holy Church is holden no tithe from such to take,
(*Et cum justis non scribantur*) —
Thus they be spared from saving, may God them better make!
Piers' wife, she shall be named "*Work while the time is meet*,"
His daughter, "*Do ye rightly*," or, "*your Dame will ye beat*";
His son, "*Thy sovereign suffer to do his will alway,*
And judge him not else surely thou shalt full dearly pay."
Let God o'er all be Dealer, so in His Word 't is shewn —
Now am I old and hoary, and have goods of mine own
To pilgrimage and penance with this folk would I fare
Therefore, ere hence I wend me my Will I would declare —

And thus *In Dei nomine, Amen*, I make behest,
My soul to Him bequeathing Who hath deserved it best,
From the foul Fiend defending, for so I well believe,
Till, as my Creed doth tell me my judgment I receive,
When I shall find remission, release of rental there —
I leave my Bones and Body to Holy Church's care,
For of my corn and cattle she taketh tithe and toll,
And I have paid the priest well for peril of my soul,
Thus he, I hope, is holden in mind to have me aye,
In memory to keep me mid Christian folk alway.
My wife shall have my winnings, and lawful gain, no more,
And deal to my dear children and friends of this, my store.
For, an this were my death-day, I owe to no man aught,
But bare back what I borrowed, ere yet my bed I sought.
With residue and remnant, on Chester's Rood I swear
That unto Truth my life long, true worship I will bear,
At plough will be his pilgrim, I trow, for poor men's sake,
With plough-foot for my pike staff the roots from ground to break,
And, carven by my coulter I 'll close the furrows make.'
Now Piers, and eke the pilgrims, to plough their way have made,
To harrow his half-acre full many lend their aid;
The Ditchers, and the Delvers the ridges dig amain,
That well hath pleaséd Perkyn, to praise them was he fain;
And many other workmen, I trow, about him wrought,
And each man in his manner to busy him he sought.

And some to pleasure Perkyn to weeding set their hand —
At high prime Piers the Ploughman, he brought his plough to
stand,
Himself would overlook them, and see who best had done,
He should be hired hereafter when harvest time had come.
But some, adown they sat them, at ale they fain would sing,
To help him with his harrow '*Hey trolley-lolley*' bring;
Wrathful, Piers called to witness the Prince of Paradise,
'But that to work ye get ye, and from your revel rise,
No grain on this ground growing to glad your need shall fall,
Nay, tho' ye die for hunger, the Devil take ye all!'
These rogues were sore affrighted, some feigned them blind, I
trow,
And some, their legs they twisted, as rogues know well enow,
And thus to Piers the Ploughman made plaint full piteouslie,
'The Lord be thanked, for labour no limbs, I trow, have we,
But for ye, and your plough, Piers, we lift our prayers on
high,
That God to us be gracious, and our grain multiply,
And for your alms repay ye, that ye on us bestow,
We may not sweat nor labour since sickness lays us low.'
Quoth Piers: 'An sooth ye say now, that shall I soon espy,
I wot ye be but Wastrels, Truth knows it, verily,
For I am his true servant, and so to warn him bound
Where in the world such Wastrels are 'mid his Workmen
found.
Ye eat what is their portion who for us all do plough

But Truth, he soon shall teach you to drive his team, I trow.
To sow his corn, and set it, and well his tilth to keep,
The crows, from corn to scare them, and guard his kine and
sheep,
Or ye shall drink brook-water, and eat of barley-bread —
But blind, and broken-leggéd, and those who keep their bed,
Shall fare as well as I do, God helping me, alway,
Till of His Grace He grant them to rise and go their way.
And Anchorites, and Hermits, who keep them to their cell,
Long as I live, right freely, mine alms I 'll to them tell,
Enough each day at noon-tide, but no more till the morn,
Lest Fiend or Flesh defile them, and leave their soul forlorn.
Enow one meal at noon-tide for him who worketh not,
He doth abide the better who drinks not oft, I wot.'
With that arose the Wastrels, would fain have fought anon,
And unto Piers the Ploughman one threw his glove adown,
A Breton he, a braggart, to boast himself he gave,
Bade Piers go back to ploughing for a bald-headed knave,
'Thy flour, we think to have it, be it thy will or no,
Take of thy flesh our portion when it shall please us so,
Therewith to make us merry despite thy face of woe!'
Straightway did Piers complain him unto the Knight, and
then
By covenant besought him to keep off wicked men,
And wasters, who, the winners to harm, in wait would lie —
As to his kind belongeth, the Knight spake courteously,
He warnéd well the wasters the better way to take —

'Or pay to law the forfeit, for this, my Order's sake.'
'Ne'er worked I,' quoth a Wastrel, 'nor will for any stress —'
And of the Law made little, and of the Knight, still less,
Vowed Piers, and this, his plough, both, they were not worth a pea, —
Him and his men he menaced when next he should them see.
Quoth Piers the Ploughman, wrathful, 'On peril of my soul
For these proud words and boastful I 'll take of ye full toll.'
With that he hailéd Hunger, who heard, and came at call —
'These Wasters this world ruin, wreak vengeance on them all' —
Then hastily hath Hunger the Waster to him caught,
And by the belly wrung him, tears to his eye he brought,
He buffeted the Breton on cheeks with buffets strong,
Thereafter like a lantern he looked his whole life long.
The beggars hath he beaten, well nigh their ribs he brake,
Till Piers with pease-loaf prayed him pity upon them take,
And with a cake of bean-flour he came the twain between
And with that same smote Hunger on both his lips, I ween,
As much as should a bowl fill I trow, he inwards bled —
And save that a physician water forbade that stead
The barley bread to moisten and ground beans, well I wis
They all were dead, the wasters, and buried warm by this.
With that, for fear the feigners, swift to the barns they hied,
And with their flails smote soothly from morn to even-tide;
Hunger was ne'er so hardy to lift his head that day
E'en for a pot of pease, Piers had made for him alway;

With that, a heap of Hermits, with spade in hand they strive
To delve the dirt and dung there, Hunger afar to drive;
The blind and the bed-ridden, a thousand holpen were
For broken legs and blindness they needs must lay them there
Basking upon the high road, on a soft sunny day —
Their hunger hath been healéd with an hot cake alway —
Then lame men's limbs waxed lissome, and unto Piers they go,
Ready to be his servants, and tend his beasts also;
For charity they prayed Piers that they with him might dwell
Since they his corn did covet to keep off Famine fell.
Then Piers was proud to help them, office on them bestow,
And gave them meat and money as they did merit show.
And then, for very pity, Piers, he did Hunger pray
Home to his hearth to get him, and hold him there for aye:
'And yet,' quoth Piers, 'I pray thee ere yet from hence thou go
Of vagabonds and beggars what were it best to do?
When thou art gone, I wot well, their work shall ill be done,
Thy going shall make mischief, they be so meek, each one!
Because their food hath failed them so fast to work they fall,
And they be my Blood-brethren, since God hath bought us all!
And Truth, sometime He taught me to love in word and deed,
And in all ways to help them if so be they have need,
Yet were I fain to ask thee if thou to me canst tell
How these men I may master, and make them labour well?'

'Hearken to me,' quoth Hunger, 'and hold the rede as good,
Bold vagabonds, and beggars, who well may earn their food,
With food for hounds and horses thou shalt sustain them still,
With bones they shall be nourished, and so their bellies fill.
And if the sluggards grumble, then bid them toil alway,
And they shall sup the sweeter when they have earned their pay.
But if thou findeth any whom Fortune treateth ill
With fire, or with false friendship, then try to know them still,
Comfort them with thy chattels — for love of Christ on high
Love them, and lend unto them, for law of charity.
And men of every manner where'er thou them behold,
Who needy be and naked, whose purse shall lack for gold,
Then make them fare the better, whether for food or fee,
With work or word, as may be, while that thou here shalt be
And win friends, as Saint Matthew in Gospel teacheth thee.'
(*Facite vobis amicos de mammona iniquitatis* —)
Quoth Piers: 'I would not grieve God for all the gold on ground
May I do as thou sayest, and yet be sinless found?'
Quoth Hunger, 'Yea, I swear it, or else the Book doth lie,
In Genesis the giant we were engendered by
Was told "In sweat and labour shalt earn thy meat indeed,
For livelihood shalt toil still —" so hath Our Lord decreed,
And even so saith Wisdom, as in the Book we read —
(*Piger propter frigus*) an he no field will till,

Then must he aye go begging, and none his hunger still.
And Matthew of the Man's face, these words he doth recite,
The servant with one talent who used it not aright
Won ill-will from his Master for evermore, I wot,
(*Auferte ab illo unam, et date illi &c.* —)
He took from him his talent in that he laboured not,
And there straightway he gave it to him who erst had ten,
And spake upon this manner, his servants heard it then —
"To him who hath is given, and so their need is stayed,
He who hath naught shall have naught, and no man shall him aid,
He who for gain was hoping shall be of hope betrayed."
For every man shall labour, doth Commonsense command,
By teaching, or by tilling, or toiling with his hand,
Action, or Contemplation, for Christ, He thus decrees
And so it saith, the Psalter in "*Beati Omnes*"
(*Labores manuum tuarum quia manducabis &c.*)
For he that wins his food here by labour, verily,
God giveth him His blessing, and happy shall he be'
Quoth Piers, 'Now would I pray thee, by this thy charity,
If thou hast skill in leech-craft, that thou would'st teach it me,
For some of these, my servants, of sickness aye complain,
And all the week they work not, they be in so much pain.'
'Now well I wot,' quoth Hunger, 'what aileth them anon,
They over-much have eaten, that makes them oft to groan;
I counsel thee,' quoth Hunger, 'an thou thy health would'st find,

That never day thou drinkest till thou hast somewhat dined,
And eat not, so I bid thee, till Hunger doth entreat,
And of his sauce shall send thee to savour well thy meat,
And keep some for thy supper, nor sit long, art thou wise,
Ere appetite shall bid thee do thou from table rise.
And bid thou not Sir Surfeit at this, thy board, to sit,
Love him not, 't is a Lecher, and lewd of tongue to wit,
And after-meats full many his maw doth crave I trow, —
And if thou thus shalt diet, mine ears I wager now,
That for his food, Sir Physic his hood of fur shall sell,
His cloak with golden buttons of Calabar as well;
I' faith, to leave his physic, I trow, he will be fain
And learn on land to labour his livelihood to gain!
For by Our Lord more liars than leeches here shall be
Who men to death by draughts do, ere 't is their destiny.'
'Saint Paul, thou speak'st to profit!' so Piers, he quoth alway,
'This is a lovely lesson, Our Lord thee well repay
Nor wend thee as thy will is, and Fare-thee-well for aye.'
'I tell thee now,' quoth Hunger, 'I go not of good will
Till I to-day have dinéd, and drunk, my thirst to still.'
Quoth Piers, 'I have no penny that pullets I might buy,
Nor geese, nor swine, but only two cheeses green have I;
Of curds and cream a little, with an unleavened cake,
A loaf of bran and bean-flour that for my bairns I bake.
And, on my soul I say it, no bacon salt is mine,
Nor, by Christ, have I scullions, to make ye collops fine;
But leeks have I, and parsley, and cabbages to spare,

A cow and calf I have too, and for my cart a mare
To draw the dung afield now, while yet the drought abide,
And this as food shall last me, I trow, till Lammas-tide,
By then I hope that harvest in this my croft shall be
Then may I dight thy dinner as best it liketh thee.'
With that, all the poor people pease-cods they swiftly sought,
Bread, that with beans was baken, within their lap they brought,
With onions small, and chestnuts, and cherries ripe and red,
And proffered Piers this present that Hunger might be sped,
In haste he ate this, Hunger, and straight for more did pray;
The folk, for fear they fetched him all that they had, straightway,
Full many leeks, and pease-cods, to please him were they fain,
Hoping, when these were eaten his leave he'ld take again
Until the time of harvest, when they might sell new grain.
But then, that folk waxed joyful, Hunger they feasted well
With good ale, and with gluttony, until asleep he fell.
Tho' he worked not, the Wastrel, but wandered to and fro,
No bread they ate the beggars, that flour of beans might show
But manchet rolls, and white bread, of purest wheat, I trow,
Nor longer for their drinking was cheap ale good enow,
The best they ask and brownest that brewsters have to give —
And labourers who be landless, and by their hands must live
Disdain to-day for dinner the herbs of yesterday,
Nor penny-ale, nor bacon, their appetite may stay,
Fresh meat they aye go asking, or else fish freshly fried,

Hot, hotter still, in serving, lest chilled they be inside!
And he who was a workman, waxed wary at that tide,
Unless his hire were heavy, he bitterly would chide.
The King, and all his council, he curses in this wise
That laws they have enacted the labourer to chastise.
While Hunger, he was master, to chide no man would dare
Nor strive against the statutes, so stern, I trow, his air.
I warn ye all, ye workmen, to win while yet ye may,
For hitherward doth Hunger prepare to make his way,
He will awake thro' water the wasters one and all,
Ere five years be fulfilléd, shall famine on ye fall,
Thro' floods, and thro' foul weather, the fruits of earth shall fail,
And Saturn sure hath said it, if warning may avail!

PASSUS VIII

Truth heard the tale, and swiftly to Piers declared his will
His team he bade him take now, set-to the earth to till,
And purchased him a pardon, from pains and penalty
He and his heirs for ever thereby assured should be.
At home he bade them hold them, to plough the fields and sow,
And all that ever helped him to harrow or to hoe,
Or who in any manner should aid Piers in his toil
That pardon the Pope granted, it should them all assoil.
The Kings and Knights who guardians of Holy Church shall be,

And who their realm and people shall govern righteously,
Thro' Purgatory's passage by pardon swift shall fare,
In Paradise the pleasure of patriarchs to share.
Bishops, who bless the people, and both laws rightly know,
Observe the one, the other forth to the folk shall show,
The twain on their back bearing, e'en as their deeds display,
And preach unto their parsons Sin's punishment alway
And how their sheep, tho' scabbéd, their wool may save at last,
Have pardon with Apostles when they from hence have past, —
On the High daïs, at Doomsday their lot with these is cast!
Merchants within this limit had many years, I wot,
But no plenary pardon, the Pope would grant it not,
For Holy-days they hold not, as Holy Church doth tell,
And on their soul they swear oft, 'as God shall help them well'
Tho' it be 'gainst their conscience, that they their goods may sell.
But 'neath his seal, in secret, Truth sent them his behest,
And bade them buy in boldness, e'en as it liked them best,
Sithen again to sell it, and with the gain thus made
An Hospital to build them, that they the sick might aid.
Swiftly to mend the hovels that wretched were to see
And build again the bridges that broken down should be,
Find marriage-dowers for maidens, or make them nuns instead,

Or if there be poor widows, who have no will to wed,
Find such their food henceforward, for so shall be God's Will —
Scholars, to school to set them and teach them craftsmen's skill,
To found, perchance, an Order, with goodly rents for share —
'And I myself, Saint Michael will send, mine Angel fair,
That ne'er a devil harm ye whenas ye come to die,
But your souls, I shall send them safe into Heaven high,
There seats for ye I 'll furnish before My Father's Face —
But Avarice and Usury with ye shall find no place,
Nor Guile go with your dealings, or aught save Truth's own Grace.'
Then were the Merchants merry, for joy they wept, I trow,
And William for his writing gat woollen cloth enow,
That he this clause had copied, great thanks they gave that day,
The Lawyers had least pardon, for they be loath alway
To plead the cause of poor men, save that they have good pay.
So Wisdom testifieth, so doth the Psalter say:
(*Super innocentes munera non accipiunt, a regibus et principibus erit merces eorum*)
From princes and from prelates their profit should they make,
And ne'er from the poor people a penny-worth should take.
But he who his speech spendeth, and for the poor doth speak,
Who ne'er hath harmed his neighbour who needy is, and weak,
But to his care brings comfort, his good doth covet not,

And for Our Lord's sake only, expounds the Law, I wot,
No Devil at his death-day may damage him a mite,
He surely shall be savéd, the Psalter saith with right.
(*Qui facit haec, non movebitur in eternum*) —
But Wit, and Wind, and Water, by Holy Writ, these three,
This is the truth, God knoweth, nor bought nor sold shall be.
These three they thrive among us, as thralls they serve us all,
For waxing, and for waning, as God shall choose withal,
Pardon in Purgatory He giveth scantily
To those who from the poor man for pleading took a fee.
Ye Advocates and lawyers, ye wot well if I lie,
And since the Truth, ye know it, then serve it, verily!
The Labourers who their living by toil of hand did gain,
Who took their wages truly, to pay their tithes were fain,
Lived loving lives and lawful, since lowly hearts they bare
Had the same Absolution as fell to Piers' share.
But Vagabonds, and Beggars, of them the Bull said naught,
Save it be sooth, the suffering, for which they alms besought;
Who beggeth, or beseecheth, save he be forced by need,
False as the Fiend, defraudeth the poor by this, his deed,
And eke beguiles the giver, and that against his will.
Their lives, they be all loveless, nor law do they fulfil,
The women that they deal with, they ne'er shall marriage know,
But, as wild beasts together, they work for mickle woe
And bring forth bairns who branded as bastards ever go.
One in his youth hath broken his back, or bone, of yore

And for this with his children, goes begging evermore,
These men have more mischances, should one take heed thereto,
Than fall unto all others who fare the wide world thro'.
They who their lives shall live thus, I trow, may rue the day
That they as men were fashioned when hence they take their way.
But the old men, and hoary, whose strength shall be outworn,
Women who may not labour until their babe be born,
The blind, and the bed-ridden, whose limbs shall broken be,
Who take their mischance meekly, yea, were it leprosy,
Even as Piers the Ploughman, have pardon plenary;
Since they of heart be lowly Our Lord doth grant it so
That Purgatory's penance they here on earth shall know.
'Piers,' quoth a priest, 'thy pardon I prithee to me show
Each clause, I would construe it, and thus the English know,'
At this, his prayer, the pardon did Piers straightway unfold,
And, I, behind them standing, I did the Bull behold,
In two lines was it written, and no word more, to wit,
And thus, as Truth is witness, so did it run, the Writ, —
'*Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam, qui vero mala in ignem eternum.*'
'By Peter,' quoth the priest then, 'no Pardon 's in this roll,
"Do good, and thou shalt have good, and God shall save thy soul,
But an thou shalt do evil, evil thou shalt receive,
At Death, Hell be thy portion" — nor otherwise believe!'

Then Piers, for pure vexation the Bull asunder tare,
And to the men he speaketh a seemly saw, and fair:
'*Si ambulavero in medio umbre mortis, non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es*'
'Now shall I cease my sowing,' quoth Piers, 'my labour sore,
And about this, my living, will busy me no more,
Penance and Prayer, henceforward, the twain my plough shall be,
I 'll frown on what I smiled at, while life is left to me.
With tears his bread the prophet, he ate, and penancę sore,
So doth the Psalter tell us, and so did many more,
For he who loves God truly he hath the greater store.
("*Fuerunt mihi lacrime meae panes, die ac nocte.*")
And Luke, if here he lie not, doth other lesson show,
We should not be o'er busy to toil on earth below
The while we dwell in this world, our bellies well to fill —
"*Ne soliciti sibi* —" so runs the reading still.
He showeth, by ensample that well our souls may teach,
The small birds, thro' the winter, who feedeth all and each?
When, thro' the frost of fresh food they be in bitter need
Altho' they have no garner, yet God, He doth them feed.'
'What?' quoth the priest to Perkyn, 'it seemeth unto me
That thou art somewhat learnéd, who taught the Book to thee?'
''T was Abstinence, the Abbess, who *A B C.* first taught,
And afterward came Conscience, who better knowledge brought.'

'Wert priest, now,' quoth the other, 'thou mightest preach at
will.'
'For that I know no letters, one text were fitting still.'
Quoth Piers, 'Thou foolish fellow, thou little know'st the
Book,
Seldom upon the sayings of Solomon dost look,
"Now cast aside these scorners," he quoth, "of bitter tongue
I may not long endure them, nor rest their ranks among"' —
(*Ejice derisores, et iurgia cum eis ne crescant*)
Then as the priest and Perkyn, they with each other strove
Their words from slumber woke me, — then was I fain to rove
I saw the sun to Southward high in the Heavens sit,
Sans meat, and eke *sans* money, on Malvern hills, to wit,
Upon my dreams still musing I went a mile and more,
For many times this vision, I trow, I 've pondered o'er,
For love of Piers the Ploughman pensive in heart I stray,
Whom I had seen in sleeping, if it were so alway —
But Cato doth deny it, and Canonists, me-seems,
With one consent they say it, 'take no account of dreams' —
But yet, I trow, the Bible, it doth true witness bring,
How Daniel, he dividéd the dreaming of a King,
And thus unto Belshazzar, (so these clerks give the name)
He said: 'Sir King, thy vision and dreaming, they proclaim
That strange Knights shall come hither, thy realm from thee
to tear
And lesser lords hereafter thy lands shall have for share.'
Thereafter deeds declaérd what Daniel had foretold.

The King, he lost his lordship, which lesser men did hold.
And marvellous, I trow me, were Joseph's dreams withal
How Sun, and Moon, and with them eleven stars, did fall
Before his feet, and hailed him as ruler o'er them all.
'Fair Son,' then quoth his father, 'for lack, it seemeth me,
Myself, and these thy brethren, thro' need shall seek to thee.'
In Pharaoh's time it fell out e'en as the father said,
When Joseph, he was Justice, o'er Egypt ruler made.
And all this, it doth make me dreams in my mind to keep
And muse on them at midnight, when men should be asleep.
I thought on Piers the Ploughman, the Pardon that was his,
And how the priest impugned it, by reason pure, I wis.
And I divined that *Do-Well* indulgences surpassed
Biennial, and Triennial, by Bishop's seal set fast.
That Do-Well upon Doomsday shall worthy praise receive
Surpassing all the pardons that Peter's Church may give.
For now the Pope hath power pardon to grant that so
The People without penance to endless joy may go,
'T is part of our belief this, the clerks, they teach us so.
(*Quodcunque ligaveris super terram erit ligatum et in celis*)
And so, Our Lord forbid else, I loyally believe
Thro' Pardon, Prayer, and Penance, Salvation they receive
The souls that for Sins deadly and sevenfold do grieve.
But trusting in Triennials, so do I truly tell,
Doth help the soul less surely, yea, certes, than Dowell.
Therefore ye men, I rede ye, if rich on earth ye be,
And trust in this your treasure to buy Triennials free

That ye be ne'er the bolder the Ten Behests to break —
Ye Mayors, and Master Judges, I pray ye warning take,
Who have the wealth of this world, for wise men holden be,
In that Pope's Bulls ye purchase, and Pardons verily,
When at the dreadful Doomsday the dead again shall live,
An ye, before Christ coming, a full account must give,
Of how your life ye led here, and kept the law withal,
What were your daily doings, ye must rehearse it all —
Tho' a sack full of pardons, Provincial letters too,
And of the Friars four Orders fraternity ye knew,
Indulgences have doubled, save Dowell shall ye aid,
I would not for your pardon a pie-crust down were paid!
Therefore I counsel Christians to cry on Christ, I ween,
And unto Mary Mother to stand His Wrath between,
That God, His Grace shall give us, ere that from hence we go,
To work such works as please Him while yet we live below,
That when we pass our Death-day, Dowell declare aright
Upon the dreadful Doomsday, we did e'en as He hight!

Explicit hic Visio Willelmi de Petro de Ploughman, etiam incipit
Vita de Dowel, Dobet, et Dobest, secum Wit, et Resoun.

The Vision of Piers the Plowman

Text B

The Vision of Piers the Plowman

Text B

PROLOGUE

All in the summer season, when warm the sun, and fair,
I clad me in a vestment, as I a shepherd were,
In habit of a Hermit, of works unmeet, withal,
Wide in the world I wandered, to hear what might befall;
And on a May-tide morning, when Malvern hills I sought,
A marvel strange befell me, of faërie, so I thought.
Weary was I of wandering, and laid me at that tide
Beneath a broad bank's shelter, hard by a streamlet's side.
And as I lay and leanéd, and watched the waters fleet
I fell into a slumber, the sound was aye so sweet.
There came to me a vision, a dream most strange and fair,
I found me in a desert, nor wist how I came there.
Mine eyes were turnéd Eastward, and lo! toward the sky,
I saw a tower, upon a hill, builded right cunningly.
A deep dale lay beneath it, therein a dungeon drear,
Deep were the dykes, and darksome, a sight of dread and fear.
A fair field lay betwixt them, 't was full of folk, I ween,
There men of every manner, both rich and poor, were seen.
They worked, and aye they wandered, 't is this world's wont
alway,

Some set them to the plough-share, small thought had they
for play;
They set, and sowed, the furrows, and toiled, right steadily
And earned the food that wastrels destroy with gluttony.
Some, pride were fain to follow, apparelled in such wise
In fair and comely clothing they clad them for disguise.
But yet to prayer and penance full many an one took heed
And, in Our Dear Lord's Service a life full strict would
lead,
In hope that they, hereafter, in Heavenly bliss might dwell,
As Anchorite, or Hermit, who keeps him to his cell,
And covets naught outside it, nor wanders here or there
To seek him dainty living, his flesh to nourish fair.
And some to trade betook them, as seems the better way,
To this, our sight, for such men, they flourish best alway.
And some, with mirth and music, and skill of minstrelsy
Won gold for glee, I think me, they do it sinlessly.
But jesters, aye, and slanderers, the sons of Judas, they,
By fantasy and feigning, lead men in folly's way.
Yet Wit, it doth not fail them if they would work, I trow
That Paul of such hath spoken I need not prove it now.
The man who speaketh evil is Satan's slave, ye know —
The cadgers, and the beggars, I saw them come and go,
Their bags, and e'en their bellies, with bread were crammed,
methought,
They begged their food with feigning, and at their ale they
fought.

God knoweth that as gluttons they get them to their rest,
And rise again as ribbalds, and robbers with the best.
For sleep and sloth so sorry, they follow on them still, —
The pilgrims and the palmers plight troth with right goodwill
To seek Saint James they pledge them, nor e'en at Rome to fail —
So on their way they get them, with many a wondrous tale,
And leave to lie thereafter a lifetime long, methought —
Forsooth, I some have met with who sware they Saints had sought.
Their tongue, methought, was tempered a lie to tell of each
Rather than sooth, so, trust me, it seeméd by their speech:
Therewith, a horde of Hermits, with hóokéd staff each man,
To Walsingham betook them — their wenches after ran —
Great lubbers were they truly, full loath to work to go;
And so in capes they clad them, that men their guise might know,
For this they made them Hermits, to take their ease the more, —
And Friars too, I found there, men of the Orders four,
All preaching to the people for profit and for pelf;
Each glossed the Gospel Tidings, as seemed good to himself,
And, covetous of capes, there, construed it at his will —
For of these Friars full many well clad, are fed their fill,
Here merchandise and money they go together still,
Since Charity, turned Chapman, doth shrive the lords for fee
Strange happenings have befallen, as these few years may see.

Save Holy Church and this folk together better hold
Mighty shall wax the mischief to all men here on mould.
I heard a Pardoner preaching, e'en as a priest he were,
A Bull he brought forth, sealéd with Bishop's seals so fair,
And sware that by its virtue he might assoil them all
Of Falsity, of Fasting, and broken vows withal.
Lewd men in sooth believed him, his words they pleased them
well,
To kiss the Bull they drew near, upon their knees they fell,
Gat from the Bull a buffet — to blind their eyes, I trow,
Thus by the Bull, he won him brooches and rings enow.
Thus gold is freely given that gluttony be spared,
And men believe these rascals, who riotously have fared.
But were the Bishop holy, and worth his ears, I wis,
He ne'er had sent his signet to trick the folk like this.
Nor is it by the Bishop the knave doth preach alway,
For Parish Priest, and Pardoner, the twain divide the
pay —
Thereof the poor had profit an these were but away.
Now parish priest, and parson, beseech the Bishop here
Their parishes be poorer, since the great sickness year,
They crave for leave and licence, in London town to dwell
For Simony to sing there, since silver pleaseth well.
Now Bachelor, and Bishop, Doctor and Master too,
Who cure of souls have gotten, by Tonsure's token due,
A sign that they should shrive those who have of shriving
need,

Pray for their flock, and teach them, and aye the poor man
feed,
See now, they lie in London in Lent, and long there dwell,
Some serve the King, as likes them his silver forth they tell;
In Chancery, and in Chequer, his debts they claim alway
From guilds, and from the gate-wards, from waif, I ween, and
stray;
Some hire them out as servants, in Lords' and Ladies' hall;
And in the stead of stewards they sit and judge withal.
Their Masses and their mattins, their Hours, they say them
o'er
I trow with small devotion — when Christ shall come once more
I fear me that his judgment many shall rue full sore.
The power I well perceivéd, that unto Peter fell
Of binding, and of loosing, e'en as the Book doth tell,
And how with love he left it, e'en at Our Lord's behest,
To keeping of four Virtues, which be of Virtues best,
And Cardinal are calléd — and how the gates they hold
Where Christ be in His Kingdom, and entry may withhold
Or e'en again may open, and Heavenly Bliss unfold —
But they at court, the Cardinals, who now the name do take,
And, by that same presuming, have power a Pope to make,
May hold the power of Peter, deny it I will not;
By favour and by learning is cast election's lot,
Of that I know, and know not — Of court will I speak more;
A King then passed before me, Knighthood went him before,
By power of the Commons methinks, that King did reign,

And Wit and Wisdom followed, and clerks to make were fain —
That they the King might counsel unto the common gain.
The King was, with his knighthood, and clergy, of one mind,
They deemed the common people their food for them should find;
And thus content, the Commons, they wrought with craft and skill,
And ploughmen for the profit of all the land must till
And toil, I ween, and travail, as true life asketh still.
And thus the King and Commons, with Wisdom wrought, the three,
By law and loyal dealing each man his own might see.
A Lunatic cried loudly, a lean thing he, withal,
Before the King low kneeling, upon him did he call:
'Christ keep thee, and thy kingdom, o'er which thou rule dost bear
And grant thy land thou leadest in love and loyalty fair,
That, for thy rightful ruling, thou Heavenly Bliss may'st share.'
And then from highest Heaven an Angel cried again,
He deigned to speak in Latin — since it doth not pertain
To common men to argue, their deeds to justify,
They should but serve and suffer — This was the Angel's cry:
'*Sum rex, sum Princeps, neutrum fortasse deinceps,*
O! Qui jura regis, Christi specialia regis,
Hoc quod agas melius, justus es, esto pius.

Nudum jus a te, vestiri vult pietate,
Qualia vis metere, talia grana sere,
Si jus nudator, nudo de jure metatur,
Si seritur pietas, de pietate metas.'
Then waxed full wroth a buffoon, of words a glutton he,
And cried upon the Angel, in answer, speedily,
'*Deum Rex a regere dicatur, nomen habere,*
Nomen habet sine re, nisi studet jura tenere.'
Then, with one voice, the Commons, in chorus cry alway
Upon the Royal Council, construe their words who may!
'*Precepta Regis nobis sunt legis vincula!*'
With that I saw a rabble, of rats and mice, I ween,
Who ran together swiftly, full thousand there had been;
There had they come to counsel, for common weal or woe,
For that a cat from out the court would midst them come and go,
And easily o'ertook them, and caught them at his will —
The play was fraught with peril, his tossing pleased them ill.
'For dread, and doubts full diverse, ourselves we dare not guard,
To grumble at his gambols, but makes our lot more hard,
For he will scratch and claw us, his grip we needs must know,
Till life to us be loathsome ere yet he let us go.
If we, by Wit and Wisdom, could make this torment cease
Then we, as lordlings lofty, might live our lives in peace.'
With that a rat renownéd, and reasonable of speech,
A sovereign aid discloséd, right good for all and each:

'In London town,' so spake he, 'I have seen folk who fare
With bands of shining metal which round their necks they
wear,
Collars of cunning craftsmen, to come and go they 're free,
On warren and on waste land, e'en as their will may be,
And other-while are elsewhere, for so I heard it tell.
By Christ, I now bethink me, did such band bear a bell,
Men might wit of their coming, and so might run away;
And right so,' quoth that ratten, 'it seemeth me to-day;
'T were good a bell to buy us, or brass, or silver sheen,
And fix it on a collar, our profit then were seen,
On the cat's neck we'll hang it, methinks, then hear we may
Where he doth roam, or rest him, or where he runs to play.
And if his will be sportive, then that we well may see,
Appearing in his presence the while he playful be;
But if his mood wax wrathful his path we needs must shun —'
To that this rout of rattens assented every one.
But tho' the bell they bought them, and hung it on a band
There was no rat among them, for all fair France's land,
Who bell and band to fasten around the cat's neck dare,
Or hang it at his collar — tho' England were his share.
So cowardly were they holden, of counsel weak withal,
They needs must lose their labour, their study fruitless fall.
With that a mouse of wisdom, methought, and counsel good,
Strode forth amid them sternly, and thus before them stood,
And to that rout of rattens these words with tongue he said:
'Slay we the cat, another will come, in this, his stead,

To scratch us and our kindred, tho' we before him fled.
I counsel this, the commune, that they let this cat go,
Yea, were there one among us so bold the bell to show!
In sooth, I heard my sire say, 't is seven years, I wot,
Where the cat be a kitten, that court hath evil lot,
As Holy Writ doth witness, for there we all may see,
"Woe to the land whose ruler naught but a child shall be!"
And while no man may rest here for rats that run by night
The while he chaseth conies our flesh he holdeth light.
Feed we him up with venison, and of him speak no wrong,
A little loss is better than sorrow lasting long,
Better bear this, our sorrow, than risk a worse annoy.
In sooth, the malt of many we mice do now destroy,
And ye, ye rout of rattens, men's clothes would rend and gnaw,
If, from the court no cat came, who might ye over-awe;
Ye might not rule ye, rattens, an ye were ne'er so free;
And for my part,' the mouse quoth, 'so far do I foresee,
That neither cat nor kitten be grieved thro' me, I trow!
The cost of this, his collar, I pay it not, I vow,
Tho' it had cost me chattels, consent I here withhold,
Let him do as he willeth, as he hath done of old,
And singly, or in couples, to chase as chase they may,
Watch ye each one in wisdom his own, as best he may.'
Now what this vision meaneth, ye men who merry be,
Divine yourselves, by Heaven, ye hear it not from me.

Then came of men an hundred, in silken hood and weed,
Serjeants they were, by seeming, who at the bar would plead,
For pence and pounds, I think me, the law they do expound,
Else, e'en for Our Lord's Honour, their lips fast locked were
found.
Better to meet the mist cloud, on Malvern lying low,
Than win from them a murmur, save money ye can show!
Barons, I ween, and Burghers, and Bondsmen, too, as well,
I saw in this assembly, as ye shall hear me tell.
And Bakers all, and Brewers, and Butchers, too, were there,
Of woollen web the Weavers, and eke of linen fair,
Tailors were there and Tinkers, and those who toll would
claim,
Masons, I ween, and Miners, and crafts of many a name,
All labourers that be living, I saw them come and go.
Ditchers there were and delvers, right ill the works they
show,
The live-long day they idle with '*Dieu vous save Good Dame!*'
Cooks and their knaves cried loudly, '"Hot Pies! Hot Pies!"
pròclaim,
"Good pigs and geese be ready, come eat ye of that same!"'
The Taverners right gaily they in the cry would join:
'See here white wine of Osey, and red wine of Gascoyne,
Wine from the Rhine, and Rochel; new wine have we, and old.'
All this I saw while sleeping, yea, more, by sevenfold.

Notes

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SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Of this fine poem only one manuscript is known, the Cotton MS. Nero, A. x., now in the British Museum. This manuscript has been fully described by Sir Frederick Madden in his *Syr Gawayne*, a collection of poems relating to that hero, printed for the Bannatyne Club, in 1839.

The poem, composed in the West Midland dialect in the latter half of the fourteenth century (ca. 1370), is generally considered to have been based upon a French, possibly Anglo-Norman poem, now lost. The author refers to the adventure as having been written in a book, and the French form of names and appellatives, Sir Bernlak de Hautdesert; Sir Agravain '*as dures mains*'; Morgain '*la faye*,' point to a French source. At the same time there is no reason to suppose that such a source provided more than the incidents; the form given to the tale is plainly due to the genius of the English poet.

The adventure contained in the first Book, the head-cutting challenge, is of extreme antiquity; the oldest extant form is found in the Irish text, the *Fled Bricrend* (*Bricriu's Feast*), the manuscript versions of which go back to the end of the eleventh century, while the story itself is considerably earlier. The adventure is also found in other Arthurian romances: *La Mule sans Frein; Gauvain et Humbert;* and *Diu Crône;* in each case Gawain is the hero, as also in two later English poems, preserved in the Percy Folio MS., *The Turk and Gawain* and *The Carl of Carlisle*. The adventure is also attributed to Carados in the first continuation of Chrêtien's *Perceval*, and to Lancelot in the *Perlesvaus;* but there can be no doubt that, in its Arthurian connection, Gawain is the protagonist of the drama.

The second section of the poem, the chastity-test, is not found in other versions, and may be the addition of our author, but this is a point on which we cannot speak with certainty, the facts that the Green Knight is named only in the concluding stanzas, and bears a French name there, and that the enmity between Morgain la faye and Guenevere, which is given as the inspiring *motif* for the adventure, is a French tradition, drawn from the prose *Lancelot*, and based upon the rivalry of the two for the affections of that hero — also that the presentation of Morgain as a hideous old woman is only found in the comparatively late *Prophéties de Merlin* — seem to indicate the possibility that the source of this section also may have been in the French original. Be that as it may, the poem as it now stands may be held to be a characteristically English composition, and one of which English literature may well be proud.

The text has been twice edited, in 1839, by Sir Frederick Madden, in the edition referred to above, and in 1864, by Dr. R. Morris, in the publications of *The Early English Text Society*, E. S., Vol. 4 (revised 1897). The translation here printed is from this latter edition.

A somewhat condensed prose translation was made by the present translator from the Madden edition, in 1898, and published as Volume I of *Arthurian Romances unrepresented in Malory*. Gaston Paris gave a detailed abstract of the romance in Volume XXX of *Histoire Littéraire de la France* and a comparative study of the different versions of the head-cutting challenge will be found in Chapter IX of *The Legend of Sir Gawain* (Grimm Library, Vol. VII). See also Professor Schofield's *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, p. 215.

THE ADVENTURES OF ARTHUR

This poem has been preserved to us in three manuscripts: the Thornton MS., in the library of Lincoln Cathedral (1430–1440); the Douce MS. at Oxford, held to be somewhat later; and the Irland MS. at Hale, possibly the oldest of the three. The poem has been several times printed, first from the Douce MS., in 1792, by Pinkerton, 'surreptitiously' as Ritson says; and from the Thornton MS. by Laing, in 1822, neither being a reliable version. An edition based on a collation of the two manuscripts was printed by Sir Frederick

Madden, in his *Syr Gawayne*. The Irland text was edited by Robson, for the Camden Society, in 1842. The Thornton and Douce texts were re-edited by F. J. Amours for the Scottish Text Society, in 1897.

The dialect in which the poem was composed appears to be that of the North of England. The scene is laid in Cumberland, and the author may have been Scotch, or an inhabitant of that borderland which modern scholars are coming more and more to regard as the home of much of our Arthurian tradition; Amours inclines to the opinion that it is the work of the same author as the Thornton, *Morte Arthure*, and thinks that both are to be ascribed to the Scotch poet Huchown. The date of composition is uncertain; Professor Schofield considers the poem to be of the same period as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*

In the case of this work, there seems no reason to postulate dependence on a previous source; we have nothing analogous in French literature. The first part, the warning apparition of Guenevere's mother, is a version of an incident found in an English poem, *The Trentals of Saint Gregory*, preserved in several versions, in which the mother of that famous Pope appears to him, and prays for a trental of masses, to free her soul from purgatory. The second part, the combat between Gawain and Galeroun, is especially interesting in view of the early tradition connecting Gawain with Galloway, testified to by the well-known passage in William of Malmesbury (cf. Fletcher, *Arthurian Material in the Chronicles*, p. 104). A full abstract of the poem was given by Gaston Paris in his discussion of the episodic poems relative to Gawain (*Hist. Litt.*, xxx), and it has been discussed by Professor Schofield on pp. 218–20 of his History.

MORTE ARTHURE

This romance is frequently alluded to as the Thornton *Morte Arthure* from the fact that the only copy known to exist is found in the Thornton MS. of Lincoln Cathedral, mentioned above, where it occupies ff. 53a–93b. It was edited by Halliwell in 1847, in an *édition de luxe*, limited to seventy-five copies, and in 1865, by G. Perry (re-edited by E. Brock) as Volume 8 of *The Early English Text Society*, more recently by M. Banks, London, 1900.

Sir Frederick Madden thought that the poem was identical with the *Gret Geste of Arthure*, composed by the Scotch poet Huchown. This opinion was combated by Dr. Morris, in the preface to his edition of *Pearl*, and has been much argued since, to no definite end. The poem was probably composed in the North, or Northwest of England, not far from the middle of the fourteenth century. It is a remarkably fine piece of work, rich in descriptive passages, and inspired by a genuine enthusiasm for the subject-matter. We know no French equivalent to the work, and it is, in all probability, an original rendering of the Arthurian tradition, as presented by Geoffrey of Monmouth, modified by the influence of the *chansons de geste*, as shown in the introduction of the Saracen element. The passages selected for translation are of special interest to the student of English literature. The tradition of Arthur's warning dream, on the eve of his conflict with Mordred, must have been of very early origin; it has been adopted by Layamon in his translation of Wace, who has nothing corresponding to the incident. Layamon's version is far more dramatic and original than that of the Thornton *Morte Arthure*, and he also represents Gawain as sharing his uncle's fall. The version of the 'Wheel of Fortune' has been adopted by the compiler of the prose *Mort Artu*, where it is given in a much simpler, and less picturesque, form (*Mort Artu*, ed. Bruce, p. 220). The 'Death of Gawain' I have given as being not only charming in itself, but a fitting conclusion to the character of that hero as depicted in the two preceding poems. No hero of romance has ever been more basely, or more unjustly, maligned, and it is well that modern English readers, familiar with Tennyson's calumnious lines, should have this, the genuine English tradition, to compare with them.

Malory probably drew upon this poem for Book V. of his compilation; in Dr. Sommer's study on 'The Sources of Malory,' pp. 148–75, will be found a detailed comparison of the prose version with its poetic source. Cf. also Professor Schofield's History, p. 252.

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CLEANNESS AND PATIENCE

These poems are found in the Cotton MS. described above (p. 331). They are by the same hand as *Pearl*, but while they display the same descriptive power (cf. the account of Belshazzar's feast in *Cleanness*) and feeling for nature (cf. the description of the storm and shipwreck in *Patience*), the object of the writer being here purely that of edification by means of Biblical illustration, they are less interesting from the literary point of view. The form is simpler; there is none of the conscious artistry of the other poems; and there is less scope for originality.

The two were edited by Dr. Morris in Volume I of *The Early English Text Society*. Cf. the Introduction to Professor Gollancz's edition of *Pearl* for earlier renderings of a few passages.

PEARL

This extremely beautiful poem forms a part of the same unique MS. as *Cleanness* and *Patience*. It was first edited, with its companion poems, by D. R. Morris, in 1864. In 1891, Professor Gollancz published an elaborate edition, with translation into modern English, and a preface dealing with the questions of date, authorship, and language. Professor Gollancz's enthusiastic praise of the poem attracted considerable attention, and of late years numerous translations in prose and verse have appeared, none of which, however, can be held to do justice to the peculiar, ecstatic charm of the original.

The most scholarly edition of the text is that by Professor Charles G. Osgood, Belles-Lettres Series, Boston and London, 1906. In it will be found a full bibliography of the subject up to that date. Since then, Professor Schofield has written his *Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in 'The Pearl'* (*Publications of the Mod. Lang. Ass. of America*, 1909), treating the poem from a less limited point of view. The earlier opinion that *Pearl* was the record of an exclusively personal experience — the poet's lament on the death of his own child — had unfortunately led to the elaboration of speculative autobiographical details unacceptable to modern criticism. All will, however, agree that the poem is the work of a man of singularly noble character and tender sympathies.

PIERS THE PLOWMAN

The *Vision of Piers the Plowman* is one of the most famous productions of Middle-English literature. It is preserved in no fewer than forty-five manuscripts. According to the orthodox view, proposed by Professor Skeat, the editor of the best edition of the poem (Early English Text Society, Vols. 28, 38, and 54), it was the life-work of one William Langland, a native of Clerbury Mortimer in Shropshire, who wrote the first draft (Text A) about 1363, revised it (Text B) about 1377, and revised it again (Text C) about 1399. This view, however, has of late been vigorously assailed by Professor J. M. Manly (see Volume II of the *Cambridge History of English Literature*), who maintains that the different versions are due to different authors, and that the poem as a whole is the product of at least five writers. Professor Manly's opinions, though they have gained many adherents, have failed to convince so competent a critic as Jusserand, and he has combated them strongly in *Modern Philology*, Volumes VI. ff. Various other scholars have sided with him, and the controversy is by no means at an end.

Inasmuch as new attention has been directed by Professor Manly's articles to the literary merit of Text A of the poem, which he believes to be all that is due to Langland, and since that Text is at present inaccessible in modern English, while there are several versions of Text B, it has been thought well to reproduce it complete in this volume. But part of Text B, containing the picturesque addition of the fable of belling-the-cat applied to historical conditions of the day, has been modernized also, for its own sake and for purposes of comparison.

While in the other poems printed in this volume the sympathy and interest of the respective authors are practically confined to courtly and knightly circles, Langland is in close touch with the folk, and his work is correspondingly less florid, more simple and direct.

Notes

There are from time to time passages marked by true poetic insight and diction, but on the whole the interest of the work is human rather than literary. As a 'human document,' a page from the strenuous life of the mediæval toiler, it is probably unsurpassed, and of enduring value.

In the original scheme of selections drawn up by Professor Schofield *Piers the Plowman* was represented by the Prologue to Text B. When it was decided to publish the alliterative poems separately, having more space at disposal and for reasons above stated, it was thought well to supplement the selection by the addition of Text A. The translator preferred to treat the two texts quite independently, and the B. translation, completed some two or three years previously, was never referred to in any way while working on A. Hence the variations in the rendering of practically identical passages.

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